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# Voices that Matter: Hearing the Corseted Body in American Domestic Performance

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# Voices that Matter: Hearing the Corseted Body in American Domestic Performance

by

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**Dissertation**

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# Dedication

For my mom, Judy Kay Morrison.

And to all of the women in my family, past and present, for whom opportunities—educational and otherwise—are new and rare gifts, this is for all of us.

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# Voices that Matter: Hearing the Corseted Body in American Domestic Performance

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Musical performance and curation provided artistic outlets for middle- to upper-class women in the nineteenth-century U.S. and their resulting collections, called binder's volumes, provide a valuable record of their musical practices. Moving beyond earlier musicological studies which use binder's volumes to reconstruct performance practice, I argue that binder's volumes can, when taken in dialogue with women's other material goods and the material of their actual bodies, show how women created and expressed their own identities through material culture and how the continual intra-actions among their bodies and objects impacted their lives, performances, and contemporary notions of femininity.

In this dissertation, I examine the material agents involved in women's musical and gendered performances in the nineteenth-century United States, as well as their material and ideological repercussions. Specifically, I consider the intra-actions of the body, the corset, musical curation, and musical and gendered performances to understand

how performance animates the body, how music, marketing, and mass products alter the body, and how the body experiences and impacts performance. I argue that the practice of corseting had a concrete impact on women's singing and both corseting and popular song performance impacted the body, the voice, and notions of ideal femininity. Considering musical performance through and beyond performativity—as an act that has tangible bodily repercussions—brings the "material turn" of recent feminist theory into dialogue with musicological studies. Going beyond considerations of embodiment and performativity to consider the material impacts of art *on* bodies, as well as the impact *of* bodies *on* music and social constructions deepens our understanding of musical and gendered performances, and also allows the body to act as a locus of performers' agency.

# Table of Contents

# Introduction: Material Feminisms and The Victorian Voice

"Discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses."[1]
-Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (2008)

"No discussion of the feminine body in the western world can make real sense without getting a grip on the corset, no matter how familiar the material may seem, for the corset has played not a supporting but a starring role in the body's history."[2]
-Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (1984)

In their introduction to *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman provide a critique of feminist discursive theories of performativity, noting that "focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration."[3] In line with other scholars identifying with the recent material turn in feminist scholarship, Alaimo and Hekman argue for the importance and agency of matter, in addition to considerations of social construction.

This dissertation presents a material feminist approach to musicology that enables considerations of how matter matters in musical performance. Using nineteenth-century U.S. parlor song as a case study, I argue that musicologists must go beyond considerations of embodiment and performativity to consider the material impacts of art *on* bodies, as well as the impact *of* bodies *on* music. Not only does this deepen our understanding of musical and gendered performances, but it also allows the body to act as a locus of performers' agency.

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[1] Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 2008), 7.
[2] Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1984), 35.
[3] Alaimo and Hekman, 4.

From its first usages in the late '70s and early '80s, the term "material feminism" has been used for very different, often contradictory purposes. In her 1979 article "Towards a Materialist Feminism," French Feminist sociologist Christine Delphy situated herself in opposition to two then-predominant feminist streams: Marxist feminism, which to Delphy, defines the oppression of women solely in terms of labor and capital, and the "idealist" view, which understands women's oppression as primarily ideological. Delphy instead argues for a material basis for oppression, a position common to second-wave feminist thought. Third-wave feminists have thoroughly deconstructed this argument, questioning the essentializing category of "woman," and instead arguing for an intersectional understanding of identity contingent on historical and cultural positionality.[4]

In material feminism's most recent incarnation, beginning in the mid-90s, feminists that fly the materialist banner acknowledge the complete lack of a unified front. As Ellen Rooney pointed out in a 1996 article,[5] material feminists' greatest disagreement arises from their treatment of difference. On one side are those who advocate a completely conditional approach to the study of the material, dependent on historical and social contexts, versus those, like Rosemary Hennessy, who believe material sameness should be claimed in order to combat patriarchal abuses.[6] Considering materialism in the field of feminist analysis brings with it important concerns about essentialism, which are

[4] Christine Delphy, "Towards a Materialist Feminism?" *Feminist Review* 1 (1979): 95-106.
[5] Ellen Rooney, "What Can the Matter Be?" *American Literary History* 8, no. 4 (Winter, 1996): 745-758.
[6] Rosemary Hennessy. *Material Feminism and the Politics of Discourse.* New York: Routledge, 1993,

validated by history.

On the other hand, materialism can be interpreted as a context-specific examination of bodily experience, which risks undermining attempts at community and advocacy. I couldn't presume to solve this conflict, which has been at the center of feminist debates for three decades. But what I see in material feminism is the debate being highlighted over and over again, and remaining open and complicated. And I think that's important. Material feminism of recent years advocates a multivocal approach to women's stories, accepting the difficult task of considering both discursive power and lived experiences, political and social structures of oppression and individual bodily agency.

Many material feminists find common ground in their positioning of Judith Butler as a scapegoat for all number of discursive regrets. In her 1993 book, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler grappled with her admitted struggle to make materiality her focus, writing that she inevitably "kept losing track of the subject" of the body.[7] Confirming the notion that academic feminism caused a move away from the material, she wrote that "this might be the vocational difficulty of those trained in philosophy, always at some distance from corporeal matters, who try in that disembodied way to demarcate bodily terrains: they invariably miss the body or, worse, write against it."[8] Alaimo and Hekman criticize that Butler's efforts to consider the body have largely "been confined to the analysis of

[7] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), *ix*.
[8] Butler, ix. Quoted in Rooney, 748.

discourses *about* the body."[9] This is where Alaimo and Hekman situate their volume: at the end of a frustratingly long line of theories of the body that "foreclose attention to lived, material bodies, and evolving corporeal practices."[10]

If musicological writings on embodiment were within Alaimo's and Hekman's purview, musicologists could very well be subjected to the same critique. The applications of Butler's theory of performativity to musical performance by scholars like Suzanne Cusick and Freye Jarman-Ivens are critical to our understanding of the intersections between performances of gender, sex, and music. And even prior to Butler's landmark *Gender Trouble*, scholars in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and dance studies—like Susan Leigh Foster, Jane Cowan, Jane Sugarman, and Anthony Seeger—were investigating how music is embodied, and how this embodiment constitutes a performance of identity.

Certainly, analyses of bodies embodying social constructions are still important, but are only one way of considering the body. Even the word, "embodiment" constructs the body as a passive entity, animated by a cultural practice. A material feminist approach imbues the body with agency, while still considering the impact of social constructions. It allows a consideration of performance before and after the discursive, to consider the material impact of gender imbalances and musical performance on bodies, and the body's impact on these performances. This is perhaps most fruitfully theorized in the work of Karen Barad, who describes an elaboration of performativity that counters the frequent

[9] Alaimo and Hekman, 3.
[10] Alaimo & Hekman, 3.

privileging of language and culture, while matter is figured as "passive and immutable, or at best [inheriting] a potential for change derivatively from language and culture."[11] She argues that matter and the discursive, the human and the non-human, should be considered in their ongoing "intra-activity."[12] This provides musicologists with a means to give agency to the performer's body as well as to the musical text, thereby effecting the deconstruction of a hidden nature/culture binary in previous scholarship that frequently relegates women's bodies to a position of natural vessels embodying often male-produced culture.

Victorian popular song performance provides an ideal case study in material feminist musicology, because of the wealth of information available on both the Victorian woman's body and domestic musical performance. Victorian women were corseted—they were physically and permanently altered in ways that undoubtedly affected both their musical experience and their sound. In addition, these women are particularly in need of agential realignment, as both parlor song and corseting have often been viewed solely from a top-down perspective.

This dissertation considers the intra-actions of the body, the corset, musical curation, and musical and gendered performances to understand how performance animates the body, how music, marketing, and mass products alter the body, and how the body experiences and alters performance.

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[11] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2008), 121.
[12] Alaimo & Hekman, 5.

**The Body, The Corset, Vocal Sound, and Victorian Ideal Womanhood**

Amid numerous online reviews of the 2012 film adaptation of *Les Misérables,* Madeline Davies reproduced her reactions in watching the film her article "Here's How We Felt About Every Song in *Les Misérables*: A Painstaking Breakdown," for *Jezebel*. For the song "Look Down," she writes, "It's now 1832 and the people of Paris are broke and pissed. Gavroche shows up and is real cute about it. Little boy has pipes. We also meet Marius and Eponine. My friends and I all audibly gasp when we see just how tight her corset is."[13]

Other viewers recounted similar reactions to Samantha Banks' (Eponine's) corseted waist. And, because promotions for the film emphasized that it was sung live, these reactions turned to wonder at Banks' ability to sing while so physically restricted. Banks herself responded to these questions in interviews. In an interview with Suzy Evans for Backstage.com, for instance, Banks said, "For 'On My Own,' I'm up at five in the morning, and then I'm singing. My teeth are covered in brown paint and I'm singing in the rain. I have a corset on. You've got all these elements that are added to it so it's challenging…. You've got to leave your vocal vanity at the door a little bit and just go with it."[14] Later, Banks said that the corset "can be quite restricting vocally on your diaphragm, and I chose to work barefoot for the role, so therefore I had splinters on my

[13] Madeleine Davies, "Here's How We Felt About Every Song in *Les Misérables*: A Painstaking Breakdown," *Jezebel,* entry posted December 27, 2012, http://jezebel.com/5971561/heres-how-we-felt-about-every-song-in-les-mis-a-painstaking-breakdown (accessed June 20, 2016).
[14] Suzy Evans, "Interview: Les Miz' Star Samantha Barks On the Difference Between Stage and Screen," *Backstage*, entry posted December 26, 2012, http://www.backstage.com/interview/les-miz-star-samantha-barks-difference-between-stage-and-screen, (accessed June 24, 2016).

feet. There were so many physical things to endure but it was, oh gosh, exciting."[15]

Banks' co-star, Eddie Redmayne (Marius) joined the conversation about Banks' costume in a joint interview with Matt Pais for RedEye Movie Critic.

> **Pais:** Hugh Jackman went without water for thirty-six hours before the opening sequences. Anne Hathaway lost a lot of weight. Russell Crowe walked twenty-eight blocks in the rain to audition. What's something you guys felt like you sacrificed for these roles?
> **Redmayne:** I can tell you what she sacrificed… Sam not only had to contest with the most hard-core corset you've ever seen—it was a sort of gravity-defying thing in which her waist was about that small—but also she had to sing her song in the pouring rain whilst crying. So I think you win the prize… I think you take Jackman and Hathaway down!
> …
> **Pais:** You didn't make him put on a corset too to understand what you were going through?
> **Redmayne:** [Laughs.]
> **Banks:** I tried. I tried. But he wasn't up for it.[16]

Though the bloggers quoted above were not analyzing the film for the singers' vocal quality, they assumed an immediate corporeal association between a small corseted waist and inhibited singing. Banks herself validated the bloggers' assumptions, noting that the restrictive corseting, though not insurmountable, impeded her singing by restricting the movement of her diaphragm. Despite the relative rarity of an extremely tight-laced waist in fashion today, the common associations between corseting and vocal sound, health, and breath reflected in comments by online bloggers mirror the concerns of Victorian vocal pedagogues and physicians in the second half of the nineteenth

[15] Ibid.
[16] "Video/Q&A: 'Les Miserables' stars Eddie Redmayne and Samantha Barks," *Redeye,* entry posted December 19, 2012, http://www.redeyechicago.com/entertainment/ movies/redeye-les-miserables-eddie-redmayne-samantha-barks-interview-20121218-column.html (accessed June 20, 2016).

century. Images of corseted womanhood in popular media—song, film, and novels—enable imaginings of the experience of corseting and its pernicious effects.

In contrast to the prevalence of online conversations about corseting and health, the connection between a corseted body's material reality and vocal sound never enters into scholarly discussions of Victorian corseted women singers. In chapter one, I take this gap as my starting point, addressing two central questions: 1.) What was/is the impact of the corset on the body? 2.) What was/is the impact of that corseted body on musical sound? My approach builds on recent studies considering the materiality of the voice by Martha Feldman, Emily Wilbourne, Steven Feld, Aaron Fox, Thomas Porcello, David Samuels, Suzanne Cusick, Kate Heidemann, Cornelia Fales, Nina Eidsheim, and others. But I delve deeper by considering the intimate intra-actions among vocal timbre, materiality, and contemporary conceptions of femininity. My understanding of these intra-actions is informed by studies of Victorian women's material bodies and their cultural constructions and meanings gleaned from cultural history and physical anthropology, contemporary views about corseting in etiquette journals and vocal pedagogy manuals, performance markings found in Victorian women's musical collections (called "binder's volumes"), and recordings of corseted vocalists. These material traces come together to reconstruct an image of Victorian women in performance, with limited breath support and a timbre particular to the corseted body. I argue that their performances were part of the patriarchal social structures in which they lived, but also did their own material and cultural work, contributing to an image of womanhood in which frailty was an essential facet.

Chapter two continues to examine the intra-actions among musical performance, identity, and matter, but the matter under investigation shifts to include Victorian women's musical collections, or "binder's volumes." This chapter draws on existing literature on American parlor song, particularly on the work of Nicholas Tawa and Jon Finson, as well as recent studies on binder's volumes by Candace Bailey and Petra Meyer-Frazier. I build on these scholars' work by highlighting the ways in which the binder's volume functioned as a medium for women's active participation in identity construction. Using as evidence several binder's volumes from the 1830s to 1880s, I show that through her volume, a woman collector constructed and performed her own classed, gendered, and racial identity. She participated in negotiating the boundaries of whiteness during a period in which a variety of racial categories began to coalesce around a black/white binary. The material products through which she created and maintained her identity—sheet music, the binder's volume, the piano, the corset—continued to influence her family throughout her own life and the lives of her descendants. This chapter serves to highlight ways in which women engaged in larger cultural movements, but from within private spaces that have been overlooked in studies of the cultural construction of whiteness.

The binder's volumes also provide evidence for how women negotiated major milestones in their own lives. Recurring themes in binder's volumes reflect the prevalence of themes outlined in the work of Tawa and Finson; in particular, they show a high proportion of songs centering around the death of young women and children. In chapter three, I argue that many of these songs reproduce the tropes of beautiful death

found in Romantic literature and art, which as Clark Lawlor and Katherine Ott have demonstrated, depict death in ways that Victorian Americans would have immediately recognized as death by consumption. Consumption was the deadliest illness of the nineteenth-century, and was considered a feminine and feminizing disease, associated with women's innate weakness, lack of activity, and interactions with mass products. Indeed, contemporary physicians believed the corset exacerbated or directly caused consumption of the lungs. Through corseting and the collection and performance of songs about death, then, women reproduced the idealization of feminine frailty.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the centrality of the binder's volume and corset in women's lives came into question. Simultaneously, the customs and norms revolving around ideal womanhood, musical collection and performance, fashion, and the parlor all transformed radically. The experience of collection and performance within the private sphere, combined with social causes like abolition and women's rights, encouraged many women to step into public roles for the first time. Chapter four examines the emergent women's public sphere in the Gilded Age, using the Woman's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 as a conspicuous case study. As women came together to organize this monumental showcase of women's arts and progress, the definition of modern womanhood was hotly contested. Women's attempts to define a new ideal womanhood in line with a quickly modernizing world were showcased in displays, speeches, and concerts. These displays and events revealed deep-seated conflict among the women organizers, between traditionalism and innovation, maternalism and radicalism, and rurality and urbanity. In chapter four, I investigate the

musical pieces performed at the Fair, the material products on display at the Woman's Building, and the experiences of the women organizers to shed light on the conflict within Gilded Age women's modernism.

The application of a material feminist approach throughout this dissertation serves to shed new light on women's lives, bodies, and gendered and musical performances. While many scholars have dismissed women as consumers of mass culture who performed music out of a sense of duty, women used parlor song collection and performance for their own enjoyment, and as part of a negotiation of their own and their family's identities. The conclusion will question the myth of music-as-womanly-duty, as well as consider how Victoriana has infiltrated not only the popular imagination, but scholarly assumptions. Women's private negotiations inevitably transgressed the bounds of the parlor, transforming the meaning of womanhood and cultural products in American society.

Though a material feminist framework brings parlor song into new theoretical terrain, it has broader implications for ongoing musicological discussions. Considering both social construction and the agency of matter allows scholars to complicate narratives that reinstate the nature/culture divide, and to find new ways to consider agency not solely based on resistance. I hope this framework will have repercussions on how musicologists talk about women, how we talk about performers, and how we conceive of agency.

# Chapter One: Corseting the Victorian Voice: How Matter Matters in Musical Performance

*May 24, 1885*
Cora Brook… walked to church (2-1/2 [miles]) through the dust with a 40 dollar silk. *Vanity.* It is not Sarah. Ada thinks no corset, with short hair parted on one side looks "awful funny & boyish." *Her* corset is so tight she breathes like a lizard.[17]

…

*March 15, 1886*
Cora Brook came to stay all night, gave her picture to Sarah. She is almost without home or friends, poor girl, but she would not work. *Vanity*. My—she is made up of bustles, pads, corsets and tight high heeled shoes. Am sorry for her.[18]

-Emily Hawley Gillespie, diary entries

## "Why does she sound like that?": On Childhood Questions and Stating the Obvious

"Why does she sound like that?" I asked when I first heard Snow White's warbling, tinny voice sing "I'm Wishing."

The answers I received were versions of: "I don't know," "it was a different time," and "women used to sing like that back then."

My imagination took over where these answers ended, and I eventually came to the conclusion that Snow White sounded like Snow White because she had Snow White's body. A body that, because it was drawn in at the waist, I imagined to be corseted and voiced by a woman equally laced in.

I was well-acquainted with the mid-twentieth-century version of the corseted

[17] Judy Nolte Lensink and Emily Hawley Gillespie, *A Secret to be Buried: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 395.
[18] Lensink and Gillespie, 330.

waist, corseted women, and corseted singers early on: from 1950s television reruns, the endless stream of classic films on Turner Classic Movies, and the *9 to 5* (1980) Dolly Parton. The "lacing up" scenes in period films like *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and the musical number "A Corset Can Do a lot for a Lady" from *The First Traveling Saleslady* (1956) taught me that corsets could transform any body into a desirable hourglass in exchange for comfort and the ability to breathe. Over time, I accepted as conventional wisdom that corsets inhibited the bodies of women singers in the past, and thus their vocal quality was different than uncorseted women now, and that was that.

Until thankfully, it wasn't. Eventually I realized that though popular debates about the effects of corseting on the body and singing are common, academic studies of its impact on bodies and culture are not. And scholarly studies of the corset's impact on musicking are nonexistent. In this chapter, I take up my childhood question again, now transformed into two practical questions that have fueled my research over the past few years: What was/is the impact of the corset on the body? What was/is the impact of that corseted body on musical sound? I will show that the corset substantially altered women's bodies and created voices peculiar to those bodies. I argue that their resulting vocal sound communicated gentility and an ideal feminine frailty to listeners and reinstated ideas of essential biological difference between the sexes.

My questions, while seemingly obvious and specific to Victorian culture, serve to further ongoing musicological considerations of vocal timbre and materiality by scholars like Martha Feldman, Emily Wilbourne, Steven Feld, Aaron Fox, Thomas Porcello,

David Samuels, Suzanne Cusick, Kate Heidemann, Cornelia Fales, Nina Eidsheim, and others. These scholars have shown that timbre is performative, that it is constituted by constructions of gender, sex, race, and/or class. This chapter builds on this work, but shifts the discussion of timbre deeper into the material. I will venture into a search for the causes and effects of timbre, gendered constructions, and the connections between them. This is a move from analyzing performance as an embodied cultural text, to analyzing the body as one text in continual intra-actions with numerous others.

In considering social constructions and material agency simultaneously, I'm inspired by the recent "Why Voice Now?" colloquy in the Fall 2015 issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, particularly in the definitions and challenges presented by Martha Feldman and Emily Wilbourne. Wilbourne defines the voice as "a writing on the body that can represent both the material world and our embodied experience of materiality."[19] Feldman goes further in defining the voice as

> a condition, action, or instrument that always escapes the unitary. It escapes the symbolic but it also escapes the culturally determined—hence no amount of homogeneity culturally enforced upon it will eventually succeed because voice will always find what Žižek calls a "short circuit," a "faulty connection in the network" or a way out…Voice is thus material, not metaphysical, and it is embodied, though how so is a question we are still in our infancy in addressing.[20]

I take these definitions—which figure voice as both material and culturally determined—as a starting point. My contribution is in presenting a methodology that will better enable

[19] Emily Wilbourne, "Demo's Stutter, Subjectivity, and the Virtuosity of Vocal Failure," in "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?," convened by Martha Feldman, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 660.
[20] Martha Feldman, "The Interstitial Voice: An Opening," in "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?," convened by Martha Feldman, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 659.

scholars to hear the material in the voice and to amplify the voice of the material in the construction of social mores. This approach not only provides a better understanding of the body, its musical performances, its sounds, and their meanings in historical contexts, but also serves to give credit to the performer's body as creator of vocal sound and cultural meaning.

**Musicological Approaches to Timbre**

The "pitch-centrism" of Western scholarship, or really, Western ears broadly, has frequently been acknowledged. Cornelia Fales notes that this bias is reflected and continually reinstated by our musical theoretical system, in which "pitch is governed by law while timbre is governed by taste, where musical execution is judged correct or incorrect according to variations in pitch, while variations in other parameters of music are judged pleasing or displeasing."[21] In the introduction to their chapter "Vocal Anthropology: From the Music of Language to the Language of Song," Steven Feld, Aaron Fox, Thomas Porcello, and David Samuels summarize this timbral analysis conundrum, stating that the term "timbre" is:

> Often glossed by the synaesthetic metaphor of "tone color." This is talk about sound qualities, an area of acoustically and socially complex verbal practices critical to the production of music. Often imagined as an 'unspeakable' realm of music, where words are either imprecise or unnecessary.[22]

Indeed, in his influential essay "The Grain of the Voice," Roland Barthes bemoaned these

[21] Cornelia Fales, "The Paradox of Timbre," *Ethnomusicology* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 56.
[22] Steven Feld, et al., "Vocal Anthropology: From the Music of Language to the Language of Song," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 322.

difficulties and scholars' reliance on a slew of vague adjectives back in 1972, but little has changed in timbral analyses since then.

Except perhaps in the popular music industry. In his section of the "Vocal Anthropology" essay, Porcello outlines the ways in which recording studios discuss timbre, identifying five discursive strategies: vocables, onomatopoeic metaphors, "pure" metaphor, allusions to other performers and performances, and evaluation. Porcello believes that this "highly codified" approach to timbre could be of use to music scholars, who have yet to develop a similarly unified way to deal with timbre.[23] However, while these discursive strategies may be appropriate for modern popular music performances, they can't account for performances from all musical traditions across historical periods.

Many scholars stick to the list of common timbral adjectives that so peeved Barthes, but some turn to spectrogram (sound wave) analysis as an attempt to gain a stronger hold on this slippery concept. Steven Rings notes that it is precisely because timbre is so abstract that scholars turn to such scientific methods, but unfortunately, this method rarely illuminates the musical meaning musicologists seek. He writes,

> In most music-analytical studies of the popular singing voice, sophisticated (indeed, often fastidious) techniques of analytical representation are marshaled to gain some purchase on the elusive vocal trace—from traditional notation to spectrograms, IPA transcriptions to ad hoc analytical graphics. The challenge comes, of course, in connecting these close analytical observations to the constellation of topics surrounding voice as a (capital-T) Theoretical construct—issues of identity, somatics, gender, performativity, grain, mediation, and so on, the very matters closest to many musicologists' hearts. That there is often a grinding of conceptual gears in the transition from the music-theoretical to the critical-theoretical should perhaps not come as a surprise. More notable are the reciprocal surpluses that result: there is on the one hand a surplus of analytical

[23] Thomas Porcello, "Talk About Timbre in the Recording Studio" in "Vocal Anthropology: From the Music of Language to the Language of Song," 323-328.

> detail that seemingly resists recuperation in meaning, and on the other an unruly surplus of meaning that has little or no foothold in analysis.[24]

Heidemann provides a similar critique but focuses on the practical limitations of spectrogram analysis, noting that spectrograms provide very little information about vocal timbre, especially when executed without precise controls for vocal comparison or when created from recordings that include instrumentation.[25]

**Timbre as Performance**

Scholars exploring the performative nature of vocal timbre are informed, first, by Judith Butler's theory of performativity. But they also derive their theoretical foundation from the linguistic and psychological study of vocal timbre. According to these studies, timbre is a facet of sound as capable of communication as the message (whether verbal or musical), giving culturally-encoded messages about the producer of the sound: their gender/racial identity and/or class status. For instance, Jody Kreiman and Diana Sidtis write that in spite of "occasional mismatches, voice quality is one of the primary means by which speakers project their identity—their 'physical, psychological, and social characteristics' or their 'auditory face'– to the world."[26] From vocal quality, listeners

[24] Steven Rings, "Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice: Sense and Surplus," in "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?," convened by Martha Feldman, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 666.
[25] Kate Heidemann, "Hearing Women's Voices in Popular Song: Analyzing Sound and Identity in Country and Soul" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 41-42.
[26] Jody Kreiman and Diana Sidtis, *Foundations of Voice Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Voice Production and Perception*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1. Quoting John Laver, *The Phonetic Description of Voice Quality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 2 and Pascal Belin, Shirley Fecteau, and Catherine Bédard, "Thinking the Voice: Neural Correlates of Voice Perception," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 8 (2004): 129-135.

make assumptions about personality, mood, gender, sexuality, and racial identity. Besides obvious problems in assuming the universality of the human perception of timbre,[27] the development of timbre studies in linguistic and psychological research has greatly aided musicological analyses, leading scholars to question timbre's supposed innate kinship to the body and identity.

Cusick, Fales, and Eidsheim all discuss this supposed link between identity and timbre. Fales points out that "to the general listener, pitch and loudness are variable characteristics of sound, timbre is a condition. Pitch and loudness are things a sound does, timbre is what a sound is."[28] Eidsheim takes this one step further to argue that to the general listener, timbre is analogous to a sound's biological truth. While pitch and dynamics are performative, timbre is assumed to be intrinsic. Using Butler's insights, Fales, Eidsheim, and Cusick[29] have investigated how performers use timbre to customize the communicative content of a musical work and to conform, manipulate, or contradict timbral stereotypes based on race, class, sex, and gender.

While Cusick and Heidemann investigate the performance of gender in vocal timbre, Eidsheim examines the performative nature of specifically racialized vocal sound, arguing for timbre's elasticity and constructedness for both singer and listener.[30] While she nods toward the strides made in the work of John Shepherd, Peter Wicke, and Tia

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[27] For example, see Laura-Lee Balkwill and William Forde Thompson, "A Cross-Cultural Investigation of the Perception of Emotion in Music: Psychophysical and Cultural Cues," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 43-64.
[28] Fales, 58.
[29] Suzanne Cusick, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex," in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music,* eds. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zürich: Carciofoli Verglagshaus, 1999).
[30] Nina Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, 2008).

DeNora, she argues that there is still a distinct "need for identification, clarification, quantification, and further articulation of the so-called materiality of sound's impact on the physical body."[31]

But for Eidsheim, as for DeNora and Heidemann, the materiality discussed is the materiality of the body of the *listener*: the sympathetic responses of the listener's body to musical sound.[32] For instance, using the experience of her own body in performance, Heidemann analyzes and reproduces four recordings by Gladys Knight, Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, and Aretha Franklin in order to understand how the various performers create and recreate gender through vocal quality.

Because different listeners perceive and determine the value of various timbres differently according to their cultural and experiential knowledge, these studies of the listener's situated role in interpreting timbral meaning are important and provide a valuable means to interpreting a vocal performance. At the same time, while these scholars attempt to reestablish the [listener's] body in timbre scholarship, the listener's body becomes a stand-in for the performer's body/all bodies, which risks the assumption that each body experiences listening and performance in the same way. Lacking direct input from the performers, though, it is impossible to know the intentions and bodily experience of their performance, so using the listener's body as a conduit to access that experience is valuable.

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[31] Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood," 245.
[32] Tia DeNora and Theodor W. Adorno, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101. Paraphrased by Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood," 245-246.

Elisabeth Le Guin[33] and Maria Cizmic[34] consider the impact of music on their own bodies in performance to gain an understanding of the bodily experiences of composers and contemporary performers. Cusick's 2009 monograph on Francesca Caccini, like the work of Cizmic and Le Guin, uses Caccini's writings and compositions and her own performances of Caccini's works as her primary evidence.[35] But Cusick goes further, considering Caccini's biography, music, and performances in terms of contemporary identity performance.

These performative analyses have provided innovative glimpses into historical and more recent compositions and performances, recreating the experiences of past composers and performers. The risk, though, is swinging too far to the side of the discursive, giving too much power to the musical text, at the expense of the individuality and agency of the composer's/performer's body.

The work of Feld, Fox, Porcello, and Samuels, though directly addressing timbre and the body, also stumbles when it comes to actually addressing the body's role in timbral production. The authors coin the term "the body social" to describe the social constructions that are "enunciated in and through the voice."[36] In his section of their essay, "Voicing Apache Country," Samuels writes

> The body acts as a resonating chamber in the performance of both speech and song. As with any musical instrument, the acoustical qualities of sung or spoken utterances—their tone and timbre—are partly determined by the physical shape and resonance of the cavity through which air passes during vocalization. The

[33] Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[34] Maria Cizmic, "Embodied Experimentalism and Henry Cowell's *The Banshee,*" *American Music* 28, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 436-458.
[35] Suzanne Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[36] Feld, et al, 340.

> subtle and naturalized control of lungs, diaphragm, larynx, pharynx, tongue, sinuses, lips, and teeth, in the production of sung or spoken vocalization, is the end result of conscious or unconscious discipline and socialization. The apparatus of phonation, especially the mouth and the vocal tract, are crucial bodily sites of hegemonic contestation over the indexical and iconic modalities of both language and music (speech and song).[37]

Despite this allusion to the material production of timbre, like other authors surveyed, Feld, Fox, Porcello, and Samuels never develop an approach to analyzing the material sources of timbre.

Scholars' avoidance of the singer's body as a source of information about timbre makes sense, and is in line with the hesitation to tackle material feminism more broadly, as discussed in the introduction. The avoidance is especially understandable in studies like Eidsheim's, which seeks to deconstruct essentialized notions of the "African American voice" stemming from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century essentialist studies assuming racial inferiority, like Lilli Lehmann's in 1914.[38]

While avoiding objectifying or essentializing the body by framing it in terms of biological, strict, and intrinsic difference, we can still address the impacts of culture on the body (as Cusick and Eidsheim demonstrate), *and the body's reciprocal impact on these constructions*. Discourses work in dialogue with material reality to create the musical/gendered/raced performance. My study of corseted Victorian women's bodies and sounds as a case study provides a model for investigating these intra-actions, as well as for the study of historical vocal sound.

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[37] David Samuels, "Voicing Apache Country" in Feld, et al, 333.
[38] Lilli Lehmann and Richard Aldrich, *How to Sing.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914). Images reproduced in Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood," 59-61.

**Experiences as a Performer**

While Heidemann and Eidsheim use their own bodies to understand others' performances, my own bodily experience in listening to, producing, or reproducing vocal sound is not my primary means to accessing timbre. But admittedly, my bodily experience undoubtedly shapes my perceptions of Victorian women's performing bodies. I am not a singer, but as a flute player, I have experienced the constraint and frustration of restrictive clothing. In college, my private teacher was a bit old-fashioned, and insisted I wear dark hose during performances. For my undergraduate junior recital, I complied, and found the pressure on my abdomen to be foreign, uncomfortable, and completely unmanageable. I could breathe fine enough offstage, but while performing found I couldn't make my planned breaths, which threw off my phrasing, my timbre, and my overall performance. (I did learn from this experience, and wore thigh-highs and empire-waist dresses from then on.) This experience informs my own corporeal associations. When listening to a singer, if I hear poor breath control and a lack of support, I feel the constriction in my own abdomen, and my eyes immediately flicker to the performer's waist.

But I don't think this level of experience as a performing musician is necessary to reach these assumptions, as demonstrated by writers in the online forums referenced that link corseting and singing, especially viewers' responses to Samantha Barks' corseted waist and vocal performance in the 2012 film adaption of *Les Misérables*. Perhaps these viewers' responses show that it isn't only past *musical* performances that inform corporeal recognition, but past *gendered* performances, broadly. As I will show, even

modern pedagogical writers note that women are more prone to clavicular breathing (a type of breathing in which air is drawn into the chest, characterized by the upward movement of the shoulders and collarbone) than men, a predilection not based on biological difference, but, I argue, based on a performance of femininity. The women quoted from these online forums—whether they are musicians or not, whether they have ever corseted or not—are reacting to gendered performances based on their experiences of their own normative or subversive (or somewhere in between) gendered performances.

While my own gendered and musical experiences undoubtedly inform my analyses, they certainly do not make me an insider to Victorian womanhood, nor do they give me an accurate take on any Victorian woman's gendered and musical experience. It seems to me too easy to point out that the way I experience singing a song, say Dolly Parton's "Jolene" analyzed in Heidemann's dissertation, *must* be substantially different than the way Parton experiences it, and from the way Heidemann experiences it. Not only because Parton wrote it for herself, to fit the particularities of her own vocal range, timbral range, and performance experience and ability; and not only because through countless repetitions, vocal performance and song undoubtedly grow together; but also simply because our lives and our bodies differ. This is a result of our situated experiences impacting the way we feel and perform our own voices, of our chosen identities/personas, *and also* of the ways in which our very bones, muscles, and tissues make, carry, and reverberate with sound.

Timbre is in part something that can be manufactured, manipulated, and mimicked, but I maintain that it is not *completely* put on: not completely put *on* us, or, put

on *by* us. If we assume timbre is all culturally constructed and performative, we undervalue the materiality of individual bodies and their agency in creating sound. I seek not to assign an essential "true sound" to any individual body, but to understand the processes by which bodies *can* impact sound, and the ways that producing certain sounds can impact bodies in turn.

**Listening to the Body: A Methodology**

At the beginning of each semester teaching an Introductory, non-majors Western music course, I (like most) dedicate a few days of lecture to teaching some basic fundamentals of music. I always allow extra time to quiz students on timbre, because first, like Cusick, I tend to favor the meaning communicated through timbre—and process and communicate musically first through timbre—and second, I find timbre an easy way to show my students (most of whom are from the U.S.) the amount of cultural mastery over sound they already possess. The fact that I can play a recording of an unidentified and (to many) unfamiliar instrument, ask the students to describe the quality of the sound, and nearly gain a consensus is reassuring to the cautious students who are thinking/talking/listening about Western Art music for the first time.

After playing different instrumental sounds, and getting students' descriptions of "warm or soft," "hot or cold," "rough or smooth," "light or dark," or even "orange or brown," I ask them to speculate about what makes these sounds the way they are. It never takes long for a student to volunteer the simple answer that it's what the instruments are *made of* that makes them sound the way they do.

Timbre, then, is the sounding of material bodies—wood, silver, or brass; flesh and bone. The latter are more malleable, flexible bodies, but bodies whose matter has something to say about its experience. We can read the body's history through timbre, better understand timbre through this reading, and respond to it: academically and ethically. Perhaps the reason why timbre has been so difficult to access in analyses is precisely because of its relationship to materiality; historically, musicologists have avoided the body entirely. We thus lack a method and a vocabulary to grapple with it.

Several types of evidence have been critical to my research of the intra-actions among the body, music, performance, and material artifacts; in short, in choosing my approach, I attempt to balance information gathered from the women's bodies themselves, contemporary views and academic analyses of those bodies, records of the experience of women living and singing from those bodies, and (unavoidably) my own experiences of my own body making music. Specifically, I draw on: existing scholarship on corseted bodies in fashion and cultural history as well as physical anthropology, contemporary views about corseting in etiquette journals and vocal pedagogy manuals, performance markings found in Victorian women's musical collections (called "binder's volumes"), and recordings of corseted vocalists. In pulling together scholarship from various fields and various types of primary source materials, I recreate the Victorian woman in performance. I argue that her body, her experience of her body, and the listener's act of looking at and listening to her body all impact and are impacted by both social forces *and* the very flesh and bone of her body. Because the corseted body was (and is) weighed down with assumptions about gender, class, and moral character,

understanding the vocal performance peculiar to that body illuminates the ways and varieties of meanings inferred from that timbre by Victorians, and perhaps, ways in which that meaning may or may not hold over to our own vocal experiences and reception.

**Corset as Raced: Whose Bodies?**

The corset allowed women to manipulate their bodies into a fantasy replicating ideal feminine frailty. And that wasp-waisted fantasy is pale faced and rosy cheeked.[39] She is white. Indeed, when picturing the Victorian woman, it's easy to imagine tight corsets and rich fabrics covering *white* bodies. Largely thanks to the ways in which Victorians have been recreated in popular media of the twentieth century, it is often taken for granted that the women of the previous century who cinched their waists to extremes were rich white women. This assumption has also been repeated by scholars like Edward Shorter[40] and Marlie Weiner,[41] who argue that the practice of corseting was fairly limited and only available to the rich and white. But the truth is that corsets were far less exclusive than we imagine we remember. Leigh Summers, Valerie Steele, and Joan Severa have proved that the corset was an indispensable part of the Victorian woman's ensemble, life, and identity; and that by mid-century, women across class and racial divides were lacing up.

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[39] The ideal complexion is a more complicated signifier of the feminine ideal, which I will unpack in chapter three.
[40] Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982).
[41] Marli F. Weiner, *Sex, Sickness, and Slavery: Illness in the Antebellum South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012): 50. Emphasis mine.

Boned corsets became accessible to a broader portion of society by 1820, and by 1850 the mass production of corsets with steel boning and steel eyelets enabled widespread corseting and tightlacing, the practice of physically altering the size of a woman's waist through the gradual tightening of her laces. Steele, in outlining the development of corsetry production and access through the nineteenth century, shows that several innovations in corset design were specifically intended to target customers with more modest incomes.[42] For instance, in 1829 the French corsetier Jean-Julien Josselin invented the steel front-busk, which enabled women to put on and take off their own corsets without the aid of a lady's maid. Other innovations enabled ever-tighter lacings like metal rather than thread-sewn eyelets. Finally, the invention of steam molding in 1868 allowed corsets to be formed on standard-sized dress forms, which enabled mass production without custom measurements. [43] While custom corsets still dominated the French market, English and American women preferred mass-produced versions, which came in standardized sizes (mostly 18-30 inch waists).[44] Steele notes that in London, it was not uncommon for urban working-class women to be corseted as early as 1824; indeed she notes that "even the poorest street-walkers wore corsets."[45] And even in the Antebellum U.S., "not only did free black women wear corsets, but so also did some enslaved women, especially if they were young and worked in the household, not in the fields."[46] Though corsets may have been a high-class commodity early in the century,

[42] Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 43-44.
[43] Steele, 43-44.
[44] Steele, 44.
[45] Steele, 49.
[46] Steele, 49

the industrial revolution increased their availability, lowered production costs, and gave more and more women access to paid labor in corset factories.[47]

Evidence of various class and race involvement in corseting and fashion is beautifully documented in Joan Severa's *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900.* In her survey of photos, Severa discusses three depictions of Black subjects before the Civil War: a daguerreotype of Judy Telfair Jackson and her granddaughter Lavinia, two slave women in Savannah in the 1840s;[48] a daguerreotype c. 1850 of a Black mother and two sons;[49] and a portrait of a Northern black woman c. 1850.[50] The commonalities between the three photos show the importance of fashion and at least light corseting for these women, and shows that they did have access despite less financial means: their clothing is new and simple, or elaborate but slightly out of date.

Though the consumer base for corsetry diversified throughout the century, the affiliation of the garment and the corseted body with gentility and high moral character remained. For instance, one letter from "Moralist" published an 1871 issue of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* pointed out that "If you want a girl to grow up gentle and womanly in her ways and feelings, lace her tight."[51]

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[47] Marianne Thesander, *The Feminine Ideal* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 88.
[48] Joan L. Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900* (Kent, OH; London: Kent State UP, 1995), 60-61.
[49] Severa, 122-123.
[50] Severa, 124-125.
[51] *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* N.S. 2, III 1867:334-5; N.S. 2, X 1871: 127. Quoted in Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 83.

**"Lace her tight": The Trappings of Victorian Woman Values**

In contemporary thought, corseting was not just for aesthetic appeal, but for the creation and maintenance of ideal womanhood. Indeed, it was the norm, at least from mid-century, for female children to be corseted from a young age. The age at which young girls were first corseted seems to have differed from family to family, but occurred sometime between age eight and age twelve; interestingly, this is the same age most girls would begin formal music lessons. This practice was widespread, and according to an article in the 1887 issue of *The Laws of Life: A Family Health Journal,* women began corseting younger and continued corseting much later in life. The writer notes,

> 'The standard age at which little New Yorkers put on their stays is eight years,' said a woman physician in busy practice yesterday. 'Call it Dame Fashion or call it Dame Folly, the results are much the same in the long run to me. Ask any dry goods dealer and he will tell you that he never sold corsets for babies so young and women so old before. The stay habit is spreading at both ends of life, and directly or indirectly two-thirds of my patients come to me through the dressmaker's thrall.'[52]

This trend makes sense; since the style of corsetry began to favor more extreme figures in late century, corseting would be only more necessary for figure maintenance.

Summers has categorized two distinct types of children's corsetry: the "reform" corset and the "standard" corset. The reform corset seems to have been intended to suit a child's shape, and offer support, whereas the standard corset created "an hourglass silhouette, a silhouette that was very unlike that of the body of [a] nine- or ten-year-old child… it was designed specifically to accentuate or create (and then maintain) a tiny

[52] "Corsets for Little Girls," *The Laws of Life: A Family Health Journal* (1887): 250.

waistline."[53] This early introduction to the trappings of Victorian womanhood undoubtedly served "to delineate gender and assist in the internalization of female gender roles."[54] It also served to train their bones to fit that silhouette. As we'll see, corseting before puberty permanently impacted women's bodies, shaping them to fit the ideal, and thus preparing them to fill their role in society.

Anthropologist Katherine Klingerman writes that "the corset represented both the sensual female body, and the chaste virgin; the female control over male desires, and the male's control over the female body."[55] Thus we can understand corsetry on the one hand as a tool for society's standardization and control of women's bodies, and on the other as part of a performance that participated in the creation and continued utterance of women's identities.

## "Your mother can breathe, and your sisters can breathe—and you can breathe, too!"[56]: The Breathless Corseted Body

Supporters of corsetry drew a distinction between regular corseting and "tightlacing": the former they argued to be genteel and sane, the latter fetishistic and dangerous. By creating a distinction between levels of body modification, women created a defense for the corset's moderate use in the face of corseting's detractors. While the differentiation between the two practices supposedly resided in the number of inches a

[53] Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset*. (New York; Oxford: Berg, 2001), 70.
[54] Summers, 75.
[55] Katherine Klingerman, *Binding Femininity: Examination of the Effects of Tightlacing on the Female Pelvis*, (PhD Diss, Louisiana State University, 2006; Saarbrücken: AV Akademikerverlag, 2012), 1.
[56] Edith Rode, 'Glimt fra Halvfemserne' (A Glimpse from the Nineties), in *Kvinder ser I Tidens Spejl,*(Kvindelig Laese), 55-56. Quoted in Thesander, 96.

woman laced down, the boundary is blurry and probably imaginary. It is evident from contemporary writings and studies of skeletal remains by Katherine Klingerman and Rebecca Gibson[57] that body modification through corsetry was widespread. According to an 1848 issue of *The Family Herald*, "Women ought to measure from 27 to 29 inches around the waist; but most females do not allow themselves to grow beyond 24; thousands are laced to 21, some to less than 20."[58]

The effect of this practice was a decrease in the size of the torso, causing the lower ribs to shift inward, the internal organs to crowd closer together, and the liver to be forced upward.[59] Because most women were corseted before puberty, the practice caused permanent damage to the rib cage, as has been demonstrated by Gibson's study of skeletal collections at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and the Centre for Human Bioarchaeology at the Museum of London Archaeology, as well as Klingerman's study of the Spitalfields skeletal collection, a collection of skeletons dating from between 1729 and 1857, which were excavated from a crypt at Christ Church in Spitalfields, London.

The compression caused by corsetry is shown in figures 1.1 through 1.4 in a side-by-side comparison: depictions of undamaged ribs compared to Klingerman's findings. I've highlighted the position of the sternum in figures 1.1-1.2 in order to emphasize how the ribs move relative to it. Note especially the extreme compression of the lower four ribs.

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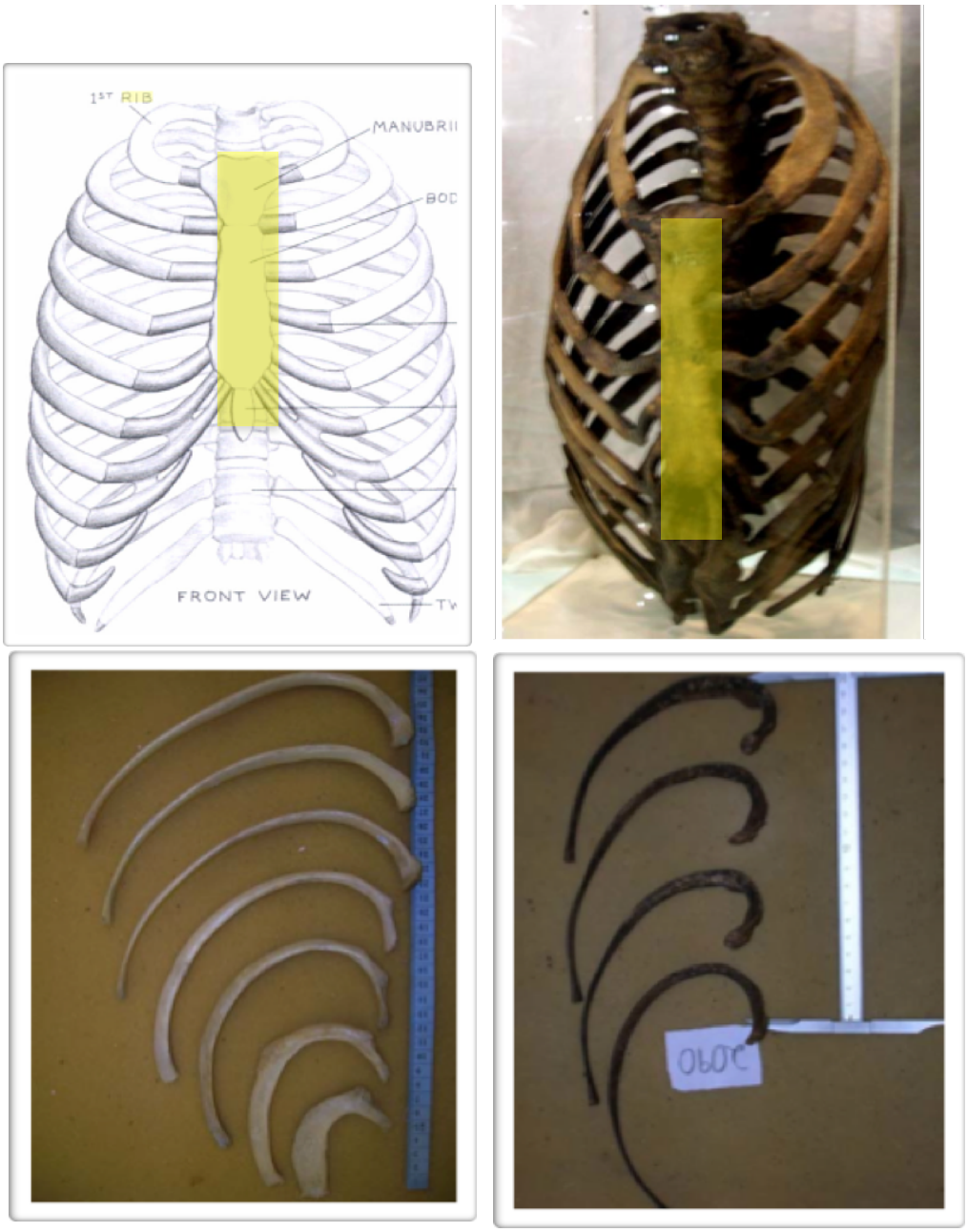
[57] Rebecca Gibson, "Effects of Long Term Corseting on the Female Skeleton: A Preliminary Morphological Examination," *Nexus: The Canadian Student Journal of Anthropology* 23 (2) (September 2015): 45-60.
[58] Steele, 88.
[59] Ann Beaumont, "Effects on Physiology," *Corseting the Human Body* (Long Island Stay lace Association, 2000-01), accessed July 16, 2016, <http:/www.staylace.com/medicaladvice/med2cthb.htm>




Figures 1.1-1.4. Upper left: sketch of undamaged ribs, Lower left: undamaged ribs from Klingerman's study, Upper and Lower Left: ribs from Klingerman's study, damaged from the impact of corsetry.[60]

[60] Klingerman, 37-39.

**Breathless Singing**

Corseting decreased lung volume, and forced women to breathe intercostally, with the upper part of the lungs only. Summers notes that "when tightly laced, [the corset] constricted the lungs and made female respiration rapid and shallow."[61] The constriction of the torso caused the air to be forced upward into the thoracic cage, thus the oft-mentioned "heaving breaths" in Victorian fiction. Kunzle writes that "elimination of abdominal in favour of pectoral breathing creates… movement about the breasts, which may be imagined constantly palpitating with desire."[62] Havelock Ellis attributes the sexual appeal of the corset to this effect alone, to the "sexual allurement" of the movement of the breasts.[63]

The inefficiency of corseted lungs to draw air made dancing particularly trying, leading to fainting spells. Summers notes that the frequency with which women fainted at balls made the occurrence commonplace, and acted as "the physical manifestation of cultural imperatives and values that determined passivity—to the point of unconsciousness—as the epitome of an ideal femininity."[64] This was often dramatized in fiction, and is just one way in which the corset is linked to the contemporary ideal of feminine frailty, which I'll explore further in chapter three.

Though depictions of women fainting while singing are rarer than depictions at the ball, in his *Some Singers of the Nineteenth Century*, Francis Rogers recounts this

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[61] Summers, 75-76.
[62] David Kunzle, *Fashion & Fetishism: Corsets, Tight-Lacing & Other Forms of Body-Sculpture* (Thrupp, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2004), 18.
[63] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Co., 1918), 172. Quoted in Summers, 136.
[64] Summers, 137.

dramatic episode from the career of famous singer and daughter of vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia, Maria Malibran:

> [Maria Malibran's] popularity increased as the season went on. [Her father, Manuel] Garcia realized her value as a drawing card and gave her every opportunity to display her qualities. He even wrote an operetta for her, in which she had so much singing to do that after the first two performances she fainted away from fatigue. This drew from one of the newspapers a protest to the management for subjecting a girl of such tender years to so great a strain.[65]

Malibran died two months after this incident, at the age of 28. It turns out that her collapse was actually the result of injuries sustained from a fall from horseback two months earlier, but the apparent delicacy of Malibran was interpreted by the contemporary newspaper and by Rogers as only the typical frailty of a young woman. They saw a delicate, corseted woman, and thus her frailty did not come as a surprise, but rather should have been anticipated by her father.

While the corset's impact on the ribs, lungs, and chest excited the minds of writers and audiences, it impaired a woman's ability to sing. The restriction of the lungs impaired a singer's ability to sustain. It limited the amount of air she could take in and by immobilizing the abdominal muscles, it also deprived her of a large degree of control over exhalation. This created the necessity for more frequent breaths and altered her volume, resonance, and expressive capacity. Rather than singing from the diaphragm, the woman had to sing from the chest. Though not surprising given Gibson's and Klingerman's findings, these assumptions are also supported by dress reformers'

[65] Francis Rogers, *Some Singers of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The H.W. Gray Company, 1914), 19.

arguments from mid-century on, as in this poem included in *The Sibyl* on April 15, 1859, in which the writer celebrates the newfound capabilities of the Bloomer Outfit:

> And now I'm dressed like a little girl,
> In a dress both loose and short,
> Oh with what freedom I can sing,
> And walk all 'round about!
> And when I get a little strength,
> Some work I think I can do,
> 'Twill give me health and comfort,
> And make me useful too.[66]

Contemporary vocal pedagogical manuals give more explicit advice against corseting, linking it to negative effects in breathing and sound production.

**Against "The Pernicious Habit": Contemporary Views of Corseting from the Physiologist and the Singing Teacher**

Brent Monahan, in his 1978 book *The Art of Singing,* marks 1840 as a watershed, the beginning of the scientific era in vocal education. He writes, "for it was then that Manuel Garcia first presented his theories on register formation. It is also about this time that Dr. Louis Mandl and other physicians published dissertations on the anatomy and physiology of the vocal apparatus."[67] By 1861, he writes, about half of all pedagogical manuals cited physiological data in their discussion of sound production, and by 1891 it was the norm.[68]

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[66] *The Sibyl* (April 15, 1859). Quoted in Gayle V. Fischer, "'Pantalets' and 'Turkish Trowsers': Designing Freedom in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States," *Feminist Studies* 23, No. 1 (Spring 1997): 110.
[67] Brent Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing Published Between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen, NJ; London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 226.
[68] Monahan. Also summarized in Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood," 50.

As part of their increased focus on anatomy and physiology in vocal production, pedagogical writers in the mid- to late-nineteenth century turned their attention to defining proper breathing technique. Modern textbooks on vocal technique identify three types of breathing: 1) clavicular breathing, in which the clavicle and shoulders rise and air fills only the upper portion of the lungs; 2) costal or "lateral" breathing, in which the ribs expand out to the sides and air fills the lower portion of the lungs; and 3) diaphragmatic or abdominal, in which the abdomen expands outward. But ideally, according to these sources, a singer should employ mixed costal and diaphragmatic breathing.[69] While many nineteenth-century writers recognized these three types of breath,[70] many others only recognized two main types, favoring the second type for singing and overall health: 1) clavicular (also called "superior costal," "chest," or "collar bone") breathing and 2) abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing.

I believe this latter division of types of breathing into a binary was influenced by physiologists' and music teachers' assumptions regarding sexual dimorphism. Many physiologists and pedagogues observed that while men breathed abdominally, women largely relied on chest breathing. For instance, in their 1880 *The Throat and the Voice*, Ward, Lock, & Co. wrote, "in females the ribs participate more freely in the expansion of

[69] Jan Bickel, *Vocal Technique: A Physiological Approach for Voice Class and Studio* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2008), 44-49.
[70] For instance, William Lawton (in *The Singing Voice and Its Practical Cultivation: Exercises and Studies for the Controlling of the Breath, Throat, Facial Muscles, and Vibrations in the Head.* (New York: Charles Francis Press, 1901)); the "Voice Training" article in *The Journal of Laryngology, Rhinology, and Otology* 6 (London; Philadelphia: The F.A. Davis Company, 1892): 241-245; and Frank E. Miller (in *The Voice, its Production, Care and Preservation.* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1910)) all recognize three distinct types of breathing.

the chest than in men, the upper ribs particularly."[71] And Edwin Holland, professor of voice production at the Academy of Music, London, refined the frequent citing of sexual breath difference in his 1892 book: "although the method of applying the breath to the voice is similar in both males and females, the mechanism called into play is not identical, different muscular movements being discernible in the two cases."[72]

This belief was challenged by other writers, who argued that the observed difference between men's and women's breath was not a natural difference but was the result of that "pernicious habit,"[73] corseting. Given that a large portion of these writers were also voice teachers, their take on the corset's effects on singing is undoubtedly informed by first-hand interactions with corseted students. It is understandable, then, that many of the writers take up the issue. And every contemporary pedagogical manual that mentions corsets writes of their negative effects on breathing and singing and cautions strongly against them.

Physiologists Joseph Chrisman Hutchinson, Thomas Mays, and J.A. Kellogg separately completed experiments comparing the respiration of uncorseted women Others (Native American tribes and Chinese women) with corseted American or British "civilized" women, and found that the difference in respiration that was often cited between men and women was due to corseting, not to natural sexual dimorphism. Joseph Joal summarizes these findings in 1895:

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[71] Ward, Lock, and Co., *Ward & Lock's Long Life Series: The Throat and the Voice* (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1880), 137. Quoted in Christopher E. Rowley, *The Voice; Or, The Physiologist Versus the Singing Master: With Remarks and Extracts from Various Medical and Musical Authorities* (London: Office of Music, 1898), 18.
[72] Edwin Holland, *Voice Production* (London: Wests, 1892). Quoted in Rowley, 18.
[73] Lawton, 34.

> A propos of the difference of the respiratory type in the male and female sex in ordinary life, we have already maintained (p. 21) that the clavicular method is characteristic of the female sex, not on account of the phenomena of gestation, as was generally supposed, but from the continual usage of the corset for many generations. We have quoted the experiments of two American physicians, which establish the fact that in uncivilised Indian women, who wear no constrictive clothing, respiration is not conducted according to the clavicular method, but just as in man, upon the abdominal type. It is therefore to the corset that we must attribute the vitiation of the respiratory method in the weaker sex, the special deformity of the chest found in certain individuals, and the lowering of the vital capacity in all those who compress the figure.[74]

Rather than a comparative study across cultures, for his 1884 book *Voice, Song, and Speech,* Lennox Browne undertook experiments using a spirometer to measure the breathing capabilities of women with and without their corsets. He found that

> A young lady who by her height should, according to Hutchinson's tables, breathe 145 cubic inches, was able with difficulty to inhale 100; but on removal of her stays at once and with ease blew 140 cubic inches into the spirometer. Another lady, less than 5 feet high, should have breathed about 120 cubic inches. Before the removal of her corsets she managed, after several violent efforts, to breathe 75 inches only, but afterwards at the first attempt she breathed 108 inches. She discontinued the use of these stays, and took to others without whalebone or steel, and continued to maintain this gain in her chest expansion.[75]

In sum, Browne found that the corset diminished the volume of air women could expel by nearly a third. He summarized:

> The criterion of correct inspiration is an increase of size of the abdomen and of the lower part of the chest. Whoever draws in the abdomen and raises the upper part of the chest breathes wrongly. In making this statement we do not forget the difference between the breathing of men and that of women. The increase in size of the abdomen of a woman is certainly less than that of a man, but there is an increase nevertheless, or rather there would be if the corset did not prevent it.... The spirometer, which is the most trustworthy and impartial referee it is possible to find, has already informed us that stays deprive ladies of nearly one-third of

[74] Joseph Joal, *On Respiration in Singing,* trans. and ed. R. Norris Wolfenden (London: F.J. Rebman, 1895), 160-161.
[75] Lennox Browne, *Voice, Song, and Speech: A Practical Guide for Singers and Speakers*, 3rd Ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1884), p. 97.

> their breathing power; nor does this refer to exceptionally tight-laced stays, but to such as are worn in the majority of cases…[76]

Joal repeated Browne's experiments with "a large number of women," and found that

> the volumetric measurements obtained with our apparatus demonstrate that the respiratory loss due to the action of the corset may vary between 200 to 1100 cubic centimetres; the more rigid and tight the clothing, the more is the movement of thoracic expansion interfered with. These various considerations should lead us to pronounce a formal interdiction of the corset; we scarcely dare to do so, from the fear of not being listened to; but we may at least go so far as to advise ladies who sing to use a corset as supple and ample as the exigencies of fashion permit.[77]

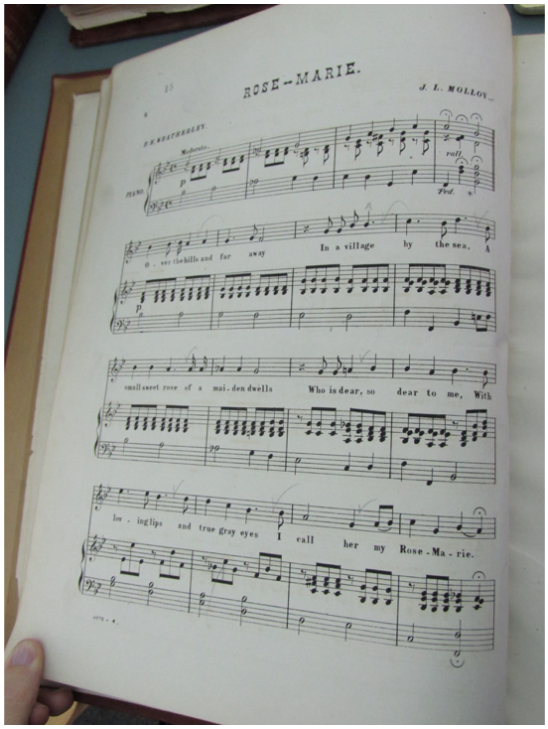
Joal suggested that, despite his and other physiologists' and pedagogues' warnings, women singers would continue to corset. This was undoubtedly true, especially for the women non-professional performers who are the focus of my study.

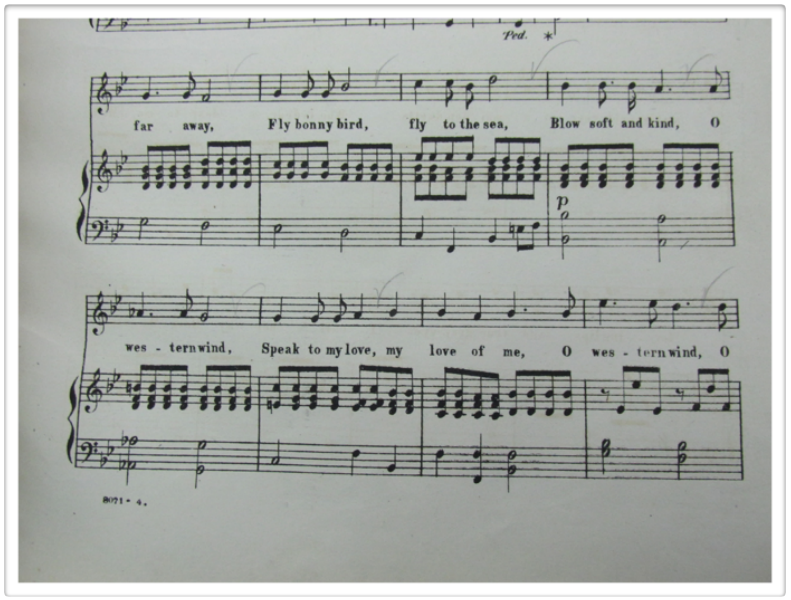
**The Planned Breath in Binder's Volumes**

Corseting's impact on breath capacity had a direct effect on women's musical performance, as is evidenced by women's musical notations. As will be further discussed in chapter two, most women were relatively hesitant to mark performance notes on their sheet music. However, in the binder's volumes I've surveyed, some record of restricted breath is preserved in handwritten breath marks. For instance, Lolita Sheldon (1869-1953), who lived in Hartford, Connecticut in the 1870s and 80s, planned and marked her breaths in several of the songs contained in her two binder's volumes I examined at the Chicago Public Library. As you can see in figures 1.5-1.6, on the first page of James

[76] Browne, 186.
[77] Joal, 156-163.

Molloy's "Rose-Marie," Sheldon marked a breath in almost every measure. Etta Cooper (1852-1935) marked a very similar pattern of breaths in William Dempster's "The Rainy Day" (Boston: Ditson, 1847)[78] (figure 1.7), as did Gertrude Wildes in several songs, including "Canto d'amore by L. Hackensöllner,"[79] and Edith Havemeyer, in many songs in her collection.[80]




Figures 1.5-1.6. Lolita Sheldon's breath marks in James L. Molloy's "Rose-Marie." Left: full first page. Right: close-up of part of second page (Chicago Public Library).[81]

[78] Etta Cooper, "The Midnight Winds, Untitled Volume," Vol. 547, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.
[79] "E.G. Wildes," Lowerre 280, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston, MA.
[80] Bethany McLemore, Personal Collection.
[81] Lolita Sheldon, "Old Song Favorites for Voice and Piano," Call number: M1630.18.O4287 1900z, Harold Washington Library, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL.

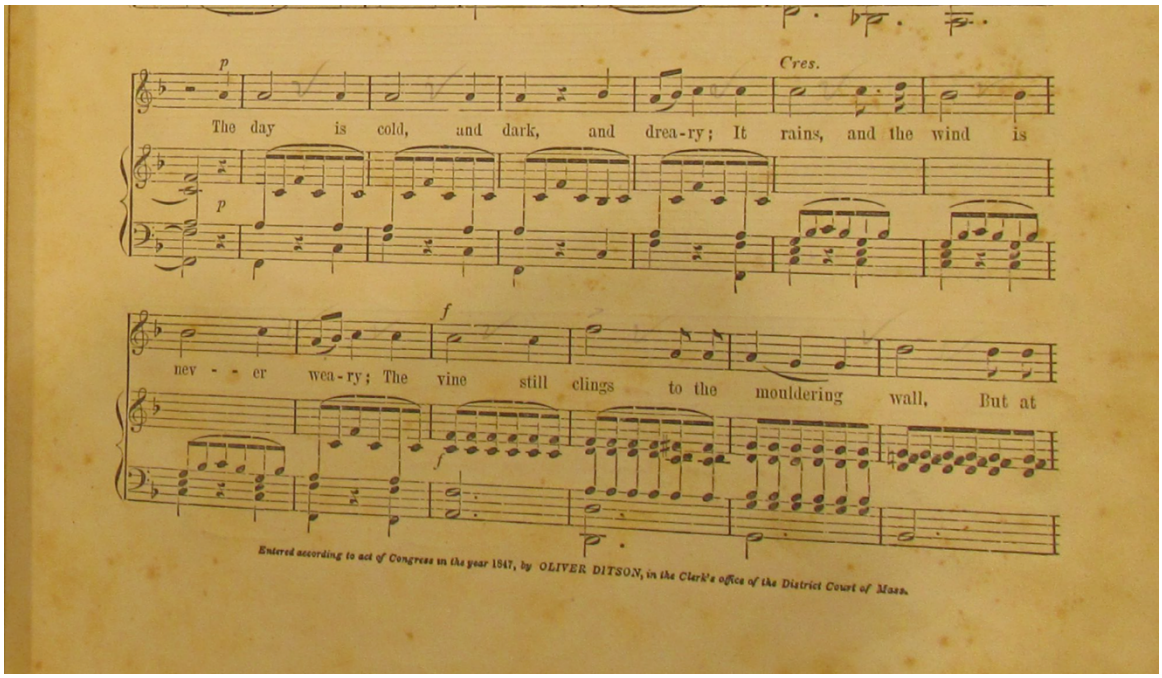



Figure 1.7. Etta J. Cooper's breath marks in William Dempster's "The Rainy Day" (Boston: Ditson, 1847) (Lester Levy Collection).[82]

Admittedly, these markings provide only an imprecise measurement of lung restriction because breath control depends on tempo and dynamics, of which there is little indication in the binder's volumes.[83] But parlor songs are usually assumed to have been mostly performed in a moderate tempo, and even if the women were performing relatively slowly, say 60 bpm, if they marked a breath every four beats, they would be breathing once every four seconds.

[82] William Dempster, "The Rainy Day" (Boston: Ditson, 1847). In Etta Cooper, "The Midnight Winds, Untitled Volume," Vol. 547, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

[83] In Nicholas Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860*. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 82, Tawa writes that, in mid-century at least, the tempo was at the performer's discretion. He paraphrases Isaac Woodbury's response to amateur's questions about an unnamed piece's tempo in the New York *Musical Pioneer* (1856): "[The amateur's] wrote to him… they state the [unnamed] piece carries no tempo indication and has a time signature of 2/4 in one edition, 2/2 in another. Woodbury replied that any number of tempos are correct for any given song; the rate of speed is subject to each performer's interpretative and expressive requirements."

**Corseted Timbre**

The restriction from corseting undoubtedly had an impact not only on breath control, but also on vocal timbre. Current vocal teachers' advice regarding the link between breathing technique and timbre is informative in imagining the sound of the corseted Victorian woman. In understanding the advice of current teachers, I rely heavily on Brandy Binkley's thorough comparison of more recent pedagogical approaches to vocal tension in her 2012 dissertation. Binkley finds that many, if not all of the books she surveyed "discuss how important coordinated breathing is to the ease of the sung tone."[84]

Interestingly, the observed gender differences in breathing practices that writers teased out in the nineteenth-century pedagogical manuals (whether it is assumed an essentialized or performed difference) are also a feature of recent writings, though the cause of this gender difference is not discussed. Binkley cites pedagogue Meribeth Bunch (1997) who "explains that excessive tension occurs in the abdomen, shoulders, chest, neck, and above when one is 'holding in the stomach' during inhalation, a common issue among young women."[85] James McKinney, too, notes that clavicular breathing is more typical of women students, and as a result "tension in chest and shoulders is transmitted to the vocal mechanism."[86] Assuming these women students are not corseted, these statements might have confused the nineteenth-century pedagogues who argued that

[84] Brandy L. Binkley, "Vocal Tension: Comparative Pedagogy in the Search for Commonality" (PhD Diss, University of Maryland, College Park, 2012), 12.
[85] Binkley, 13. Citing Meribeth Bunch, *Dynamics of the Singing Voice*, 4th ed. (Wien: Springer-Verlag, 1997), 53.
[86] James C. McKinney, *Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults,* rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Genevox Music Group, 1994), 57. Quoted in Binkley, 14.

breath difference was *not* dimorphic, but the result of corseting. They might be surprised that the problem was not resolved with the decline of the garment.

Unfortunately, the corset's impact on women's bodies has outlasted the fashion. Though it may no longer be common to lace down six inches, the corset has had a distinguished afterlife, impacting the desired woman's figure throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. The Western ideal female form has shifted over time, but a large waist has never come into vogue. Many women still perform gender by making themselves smaller, consciously and subconsciously, through dieting, stooped posture, or simply sucking in their stomachs to take up less space. Clavicular breathing is the breathing of small waists and heaving bosoms. It is still the feminine ideal, not because of some biological difference between the sexes, but because gender performativity impacts the material in subtle and persistent ways.

Modern pedagogical writers note common effects of clavicular breathing on vocal performance. Bunch states that "correct" breathing is silent; loud intakes of breath are associated with clavicular breathing and "only fill the upper portions of the lungs with air, and result in the throat controlling the expiration of the air."[87] This last outcome, controlled exhalation, is the most commonly expressed concern related to clavicular breathing. Cornelius Reid (1950) advises:

> The teacher who seeks to alleviate the breathless condition of the student whose voice works poorly, by attempting to control the rate of expulsion, is perpetrating the grossest injustice... Rationing the breath expulsion is always exceedingly

[87] Binkley, 14.

> dangerous, and there is convincing proof on all sides to support the claim that throatiness is the natural result of controlled expiration.[88]

Richard Miller,[89] Barbara Doscher,[90] and McKinney share Reid's concerns about the effect of clavicular breathing on vocal tone and vocal health.

While all the surveyed writers seem to agree that clavicular breathing causes tension, the location of the resulting tension varies: in the shoulder and neck, or in the shoulders, chest, and the vocal chords.[91] But all the writers maintain that clavicular breathing is unsuccessful and unsustainable and should be remedied immediately. Interestingly, in a discussion of how to combat the habit, Binkley describes techniques used by University of Maryland vocal professor Martha Randall and East Carolina University vocal pedagogy program chair Perry Smith who:

> have the students experience the breath lying on the floor to feel the natural pull of gravity in the abdomen. Randall said that she would explain to her students how gravity does all the work when lying on the ground, but in standing, the abdominals had to work more. She said she used statements and commands like "invite the air in" and "we are not wearing corsets today."[92]

To summarize, we have seen that nineteenth-century pedagogues established the inefficiency of clavicular breathing and tied this type of breathing specifically to women. Several writers deduced that this type of breathing was more prominent in women because of the restriction caused by corseting. Mid- to late-twentieth-century writers on

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[88] Cornelius Reid, *Bel Canto; Principle and Practices* (New York: Coleman-Ross Co., 1950), 150-151. Quoted in Binkley, 15.
[89] Richard Miller, *Solution of Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[90] Barbara M. Doscher, *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice,* 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994).
[91] Reid believes the former, Doscher and McKinney believe the latter. Cited in Binkley, 14.
[92] Binkley, 49.

vocal technique also advised strongly against clavicular breathing, which they also observed more often in female students, but were more explicit about its destructive effects on vocal technique and timbre.

It is understandable that the nineteenth-century pedagogues wouldn't have noted timbral effects of corseting and clavicular breathing, because timbre wasn't a major focus of vocal pedagogy until relatively late in the century. Around the 1880s, writers began to define vocal quality and individual singer's voices in terms of timbre.[93] Monahan writes that until mid-century, voices were purely classified by range. But "in later years, the popular determinate changed to timbre,"[94] as in the writings of Albert Bach (1880), Charles Lunn (1904), Frederick Crowest (1900), and Frantz Proschowsky (1923). For instance, Crowest wrote, "remember always that the character of a voice is determined not by the compass or range of notes, but by quality, or body and timbre, of tone."[95] In Luisa Tetrazzini's *How to Sing* (1923), she draws a connection between timbre and overall health, saying that vocal quality is "largely individual, and sometimes a matter of health and circumstances."[96]

And, in a move common to the pedagogical writings of the next century, in her *Artistic Singing* (1883), Sabrina Dow ties clavicular and lateral breathing directly to vocal and bodily health as well as to timbral quality, writing:

> Any method of singing, whatever its name, which counsels a *drawing in of the abdomen* in taking the breath, and an exaggerated costal movement, is one which

[93] Monahan, 36.
[94] Monahan, 36.
[95] Frederick James Crowest, *Advice to Singers*, 10th ed. (London: F. Warne and Co., 1900), p. 29. Quoted in Monahan, 36.
[96] Luisa Tetrazzini, *How to Sing* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1923), 39. Quoted by Monahan, 36.

> prevents the natural action of the diaphragm, and consequently the easiest and greatest expansion of the chest… The use of the exaggerated lateral and the clavicular modes is the cause of the early wear of voices. The first sign of their injurious effects is the uncontrollable *tremolo*, and the inability of the singer to diminish his tones or phrases. Forcing of the voice, especially in the upper tones, is an inevitable result of this breath, since the expiration is beyond the singer's control… This is singing without method; and it happens that, through a want of an intelligent control of this power at all times, they are the victims of uncertainty, and at last of failure… Facile and smooth vocalization becomes impossible; while forced tones and early wear of the voice are inevitable. The lungs, when the action of the diaphragm is hindered by these contractions, are not fully inflated, and consequently the health suffers.[97]

Given the results of clavicular breathing cited by these authors, I argue that, for the Victorian corseted woman, lack of breath support and tension caused by the inability to breathe in any way *other than* clavicular breathing undoubtedly created a range of timbral possibilities unique to the corseted body.

**Recorded Evidence of Corseted Singing**

Some aural evidence of the corset's impact on breath control and timbre is available through turn-of-the-century commercial recordings of corseted professional singers and home recordings of women's domestic performances. In the following discussion, I've only included recordings that are currently accessible online, and have provided the hyperlinks as footnotes. Before analyzing the recordings, I hypothesized the following seven results of corseted singing based on my survey of contemporary and modern pedagogical writings. I've divided the possible effects into results that would occur sporadically and results that would color the whole performance:

[97] Sabrina Dow, *Artistic Singing* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1883), 55-58. Interesting that she assumes a male singer here.

Sporadic occurrences:

1. More frequent breathing
2. Audible inhalation
3. Sounds of breathlessness (*italics*)
4. "Forcing" the voice, especially in upper range and at ends of phrases (underlined)
5. "Uncontrollable tremolo" (**bold**)

More general timbral and expressive qualities:

6. Controlled expiration causing throatiness
7. Loss of dynamic range

In the analyses that follow, I document the sporadic occurrences (nos. 1-5) for each song in a table with the song lyrics. To note either a space for a breath ([1]) or an audible breath ([2]), I notate the printed lyrics with the bracketed number ([1] or [2]) where the breath occurs. I note issues nos. 3, 4, and 5 by printing the lyrics in italics, underlined, or in bold, respectively; and also note the issue number ([3], [4], or [5]) in the "Other Notes" column. The general qualities (nos. 6 and 7) are discussed in the text that follows the table.

Admittedly, these analyses are partial, subjective, and incomplete. I don't know the circumstances of the particular recording conditions that may have impacted each vocalist's sound and breathing. The speed at which the recording was digitally preserved and the various media and qualities of the preserved recordings all undoubtedly distort my perception of the women's performances. Nonetheless, the survival of these aural traces of corseted professional women's and amateur women's performances is remarkable, and I include them here as one way of understanding corseted vocal timbre and breath support. My findings comply both with findings from physical analyses of the corseted body and vocal pedagogue's understanding of the results of clavicular breathing on vocal sound and control.

The most prominent (and latest) recording included in this discussion is one from a turn-of-the-century performer with a notorious corseted waist, Polaire. The French *café concert* singer came to the U.S. on tour for the first time in 1910 and recorded Vincent Scotto's "Tchique Tchique" with Odeon Records in 1923.[98]

Table 1.1. Polaire, "Tchique Tchique" (1923)

| **Time** | **French Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2])** | **Other Notes** | **English Translation[99]** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0:08 | Dominique **[1]** | | Dominique |
| 0:10 | Dit à Angélique: **[1]** | | said to Angelica: |
| 0:12 | "Ah! Je suis fou **[1]** | | "Ah! I'm crazy |
| 0:15 | D'amour pour vous. **[1]** | | out of love for you. |
| 0:18 | Mon cœur tremble **[1]** | | My heart trembles. |
| 0:20 | Voulez-vous qu'ensemble **[1]** | | Do you want together |
| 0:21 | Nous mélangions **[1]** | | to bring together |
| 0:23 | Nos frissons? **[1]** | [4] | our thrills? |
| 0:26 | Venez donc, **[1]** tchique, tchique | | Come then, tchique, tchique |
| 0:29 | Nous serons, **[1]** tchique, tchique | | we will, tchique, tchique |
| 0:31 | Tous deux, **[1]** tchique, tchique | [4] | Together, tchique, tchique |
| 0:33 | Très heureux. **[1]** tchique, tchique **[1]** | | be very happy. tchique, tchique |
| 0:36 | Ça f'rait, **[1]** tchique, tchique | | That would, tchique, tchique |
| 0:38 | Toucher, **[2]** tchique, tchique **[1]** | | touch, tchique, tchique |
| 0:40 | Votre cœur, **[1]** tchique, tchique **[1]** | [4] | your heart, tchique, tchique |
| 0:41 | Quel Bonheur! **[1]** | [4] | What a joy! |
| 0:46 | Quand on aime **[1]** | | When one loves |

[98] A recording of "Tchique Tchique" is available on the page "Polaire," *Du temps des cerises aux feuilles mortes*, accessed July 13, 2016, <http://www.dutempsdescerisesauxfeuillesmortes.net/fiches_bio/polaire/polaire.htm>

[99] Thanks to Jeannie Binder for her help with this translation.

Table 1.1, cont.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0:49 | D'un amour extreme | | with a passionate love… |
| 0:50 | Ah, **[1]** caramba! **[1]** | | Ah, caramba! |
| 0:52 | Faut s' montrer là, **[1]** | [4] | It must show itself |
| 0:55 | Mon étreinte **[1]** | | My embrace |
| 0:57 | Ne sera pas feinte **[1]** | | will not be feigned. |
| 0:59 | J' vous **[1]** ferai voir **[1]** | | I will show you |
| 1:02 | Mon savoir **[1]** | [4] | my skill. |
| 1:04 | Cette nuit **[1]** Tchique tchique | | Tonight, |
| 1:07 | Sans bruit **[1]** Tchique tchique | | quietly, |
| 1:09 | C'est moi **[1]** Tchique tchique | | It is me. |
| 1:11 | Quel émoi! **[1]** Tchique tchique **[1]** | [4] | What |
| 1:13 | Sincère **[1]** Tchique tchique | | sincere emotion! |
| 1:15 | J' veux faire **[1]** Tchique tchique **[2]** | [4] | I want to |
| 1:17 | La cour **[1]** Tchique tchique | | court |
| 1:19 | Jusqu'au jour." **[1]** | [4] | until daybreak." |
| 1:24 | Angélique **[1]** | [4] | Angélique |
| 1:25 | Était très pudique **[1]** | | was very chaste. |
| 1:28 | Elle accepta **[1]** | | She accepted, |
| 1:31 | Mais voilà, **[1]** | | but alas, |
| 1:33 | D'vant m'sieur l' maire **[1]** | | before that, Monsieur Mayor |
| 1:35 | Il dut laisser faire, **[1]** | [4] | had to agree |
| 1:37 | Il **[1]** prit sa main **[1]** | | to take her hand |
| 1:39 | Le lend'main **[1]** | | the next day. |
| 1:42 | Ses enfants **[1]** Tchique tchique | | Their children, |
| 1:44 | Très charmants **[1]** Tchique tchique | | very charming, |
| 1:46 | Les unissent **[1]** Tchique tchique | [4] | unite them. |
| 1:48 | Quel délice! **[1]** Tchique tchique **[1]** | [4] | What a delight! |
| 1:51 | Belle image **[1]** Tchique tchique **[1]** | | Beautiful picture |
| 1:53 | Du mariage **[1]** *Tchique tchique* **[1]** | [3] [4] | of marriage. |
| 1:55 | Leur amour **[1]** *Tchique tchique* | [3] [4] | Their love |
| 1:57 | Dure toujours **[1]** | | lasts forever. |

As she sings, Polaire takes a breath at least once every four beats, often every two. The timbre of Polaire's voice is strained, created by a lack of support for which she struggles to compensate by pushing from the chest and throat. This intensifies throughout the duration of the recording, as if she becomes more and more deprived of air the longer she sings (especially audible in the final chorus, 1:42 to the end).

A 1911 recording of "Annie Laurie"[100] by the Australian singer Marie Narelle (1870-1941) offers a very different version of corseted vocal production, probably due to the difference in genre, singing style, and audience for the more upstanding ballad singer, known as "The Australian Queen of Irish Song."

Unlike Polaire, Narelle's timbre is brighter, more vibrant, with a fairly consistent fast vibrato which sometimes gains the uncontrollable tremor Sabrina Dow alluded to in 1883. And at some points, it loses its quaver altogether as the singer squeezes out her last drop of air, like at the end of the line "And dark blue is her eye" (2:30). Though I would not describe Marelle's voice as "throaty" from lack of control, she exercises little control over musical expression. As she ascends, she's unable to control the crescendo. She forces her voice to reach the heights of the line, and expression gives way to simply sounding the pitch. Decrescendos, too, are not the result of expressive planning, but rather result from a lack of air and straining to reach low notes. Narelle has fewer moments of audible breathlessness than Polaire. This is probably because the slower

[100] Marie Narelle, "Annie Laurie," Edison Amberol: 862, 1911 (UCSB – Cylinder Audio Archive, Todd Collection), accessed Dec. 28, 2015, http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder2101.

tempo and instrumental interludes provide longer recovery times. But her breaths are frequent and frequently audible, a common effect of clavicular breathing.

Table 1.2. Marie Narelle, “Annie Laurie” (1911)

| Time | Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2]) | Other Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 0:26 | Maxwelton's braes **are** bonnie, **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 0:33 | Where early fa's the dew, **[1]** | |
| 0:40 | And twas there that Annie Laurie **[1]** | |
| 0:47 | Gi'ed me her promise true. **[1]** | |
| 0:54 | Gi'ed me her promise true – **[1]** | |
| 1:01 | Which ne'er for*got* **[1]** will be, **[1]** | |
| 1:08 | And for bonnie ***An****nie Laurie* **[1]** | [3] [4] [5] |
| 1:18 | I'd lay me down **[1]** and dee. **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:46 | Her brow is like the snaw-drift, **[2]** | |
| 1:53 | Her neck is like the swan, **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:00 | And her face it is the fairest, **[2]** | [4] |
| 2:08 | That e'er the sun **[1]** shone on. **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:18 | That e'er the sun shone on – **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:24 | And dark blue is her eye, **[1]** | |
| 2:31 | And for bonnie **An**nie Laurie **[1]** | [5] |
| 2:40 | I'd lay me down **[1]** and dee. **[1]** | |
| 3:07 | Like dew on gowans lyin’, **[1]** | |
| 3:14 | Is the **fa'** o' her fairy feet, **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 3:21 | And like winds, in summer sighin’, **[1]** | [4] |
| 3:29 | Her voice is low and sweet. | [4] |
| 3:38 | Her voice is low and sweet – **[2]** | |
| 3:45 | And she's a' the *world* **[2]** to me; **[2]** | [3] |
| 3:52 | And for bonnie Annie Laurie **[1]** | |
| 4:02 | I'd lay me down **[2] and** dee. **[1]** | [5] |

Narelle's performance is similar to another available through the Library of Congress's Emil Berliner Collection, an excerpt from Charles Lecocq's opéra comique, *Fille De Madame Angot*, recorded by Laura Libra in New York in 1898.[101] Libra's vibrato in this recording is comparable to Narelle's in "Annie Laurie," with its intentional, very fast vibrato. But the timbral quality is completely different. While Narelle's is strong and nasal, Libra's is overall lighter and more delicate, though when she presses at the ends of her range or at the ends of phrases, her timbre sharpens to resemble Narelle's. This doesn't necessarily speak to differences in the women's skill, but perhaps differences in the genres they were performing—the popular Scottish song versus an excerpt from an opéra comique; the slow and mournful versus the fast and coquettish. Similar to Polaire's performance, the Libra recording captures several moments of audible breathlessness.

Another Berliner recording artist of the 1890s, Annie Carter, recorded "The Church Across the Way" which is also preserved online by the Library of Congress.[102] Annie Carter's singing style fills the gap between Libra and Narelle on one end and singers at home on the other, as we will see. The majority of the song sits comfortably within her range, but she has to push her voice to reach the lowest notes. Her timbre is forced and throaty in several spots, but it mostly sounds fairly easy due to much of the song lying in her speaking range. Her breaths are frequent and disrupt the sentence

[101] Charles Lecocq, Siraudin Clairville, Victor Koning, and Laura Libra, *Fille de Madame Angot Couplet Clairette* (E. Berliner's Gramophone, New York, monographic, 1898), The Library of Congress, accessed July 12, 2016, https://www.loc.gov/item/00579609/.
[102] William Benson Gray, and Annie Carter. *The Church Across the Way* (E. Berliner's Gramophone, United States, monographic, 189-), The Library of Congress, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/99389722/>

structure in two spots: at “in a home **[1]** just o'er the way **[1]**” and in the final quoted line, “Nearer **[1]** my God **[1]** to **thee** **[1]**.”

Table 1.3. Annie Carter, “The Church Across the Way” (1890s)

| **Time** | **Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2])** | **Other Notes** |
|---|---|---|
| 0:05 | One Easter Sunday morning, **[1]** | |
| 0:09 | when the sun was shining clear, **[1]** | |
| 0:13 | The good folks to the old church went **[1]** | |
| 0:16 | the parson's prayers to **hear**, **[1]** | [5] |
| 0:20 | They little knew while seated there, **[1]** | |
| 0:24 | upon that blessed day, **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:27 | A human life was ending **[1]** | |
| 0:30 | in a home **[1]** just o'er the way. **[1]** | |
| 0:35 | A man in deepest poverty, | [4] |
| 0:38 | without a single friend, **[1]** | |
| 0:41 | Would answer soon the call of *death*, **[1]** | [3] |
| 0:45 | his life was *nearing end*, **[1]** | [3] |
| 0:49 | With no one there to comfort **him**, **[1]** | [5] |
| 0:53 | no tender words to **say** **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 0:56 | He heard the morning service **[1] - tempo** | |
| 1:00 | in the church **[1]** across the **way. [1]** | [4] [5] |
| 1:05 | The minister was preach**ing [1]** | [5] |
| 1:09 | his good and sacred teach**ing**, **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 1:14 | The congregation sat, in ecsta**sy**; **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 1:22 | The bells had just ceased ringing, **[1]** | |
| 1:26 | the choir was sweetly sing***ing,*** **[1]** | [3] [5] |
| 1:32 | “Nearer **[1]** my God **[1]** to **thee**.” **[1]** | [4] [5] |

**Brown Wax Cylinders: Early Home Recordings**

Brown wax cylinders, the first recording medium with widespread commercial availability, were most prevalent around the turn of the century (1895-1901). Many of these cylinders have been digitized by the University of California Santa Barbara's Cylinder Audio Archive. In addition to selling brown wax cylinder commercial recordings, Edison Records also sold cylinders for home recording purposes. The UCLA archive writes that these cylinders were "wax 'blanks,' Edison claimed could be reused up to 100 times by literally shaving off the old grooves. In this way, brown wax blanks could perhaps be considered an early rewritable medium, akin to a CD-RW today."[103] These recordings come with their own set of methodological issues, due to their poor quality and, often, a lack of information about playback speed or the performer's identity. They do, however, provide at least a blurry glimpse into the sound of non-professional women singers, recording themselves at home or church.

This first home recording I will discuss is rare for its identification of the vocalist; at the beginning of this recording, a man announces, "'Down in the Licensed Saloon,' sung by Mrs. F. G. Van Meter."[104] Mrs. F. G. Van Meter was born Cora "Maude" Watson in Avoca, Illinois in 1870 to James and Mary Watson, but was soon adopted by William and Elizabeth Asay. Maude married an Iowa farmer, Francis Grant Van Meter on the day after Valentine's Day in 1888. Her husband's family made several wax

[103] "Brown Wax Cylinders (1895-1901)," UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive, accessed July 14, 2016, http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/history-brownwax.php.
[104] "[Brown wax home recording of Down in the licensed saloon, by F. E. Landinger (?)]," The David Giovannoni Collection of home cylinder recordings (Set Number: 339-01, Originally acquired: From Bill Marten (Madison, WI), wife's family's recordings, 2007), accessed December 28, 2016, http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder13244.

cylinder recordings, including several by her sister-in-law, Hannah (Van Meter) Leighton.[105]

Table 1.4. Maude Watson Van Meter, "Down in the Licensed Saloon" (n.d.)

| Time | Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2]) | Other Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 0:16 | Where is my wand'ring boy tonight! **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:22 | Down in the licensed saloon. **[1]** | |
| 0:27 | Down in a room all cozy and bright**,** **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:32 | Filled with the glare of many a light, **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:36 | Beautiful music the ear to delight, **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:41 | Down in the licensed saloon **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:46 | There is my wand'ring *boy tonight*, **[1]** | [3] [4] |
| 0:53 | There is my wand'ring boy tonight, **[1]** | |
| 0:59 | Down, down, **[1]** down, down **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:05 | Down in the licensed saloon **[1]** | |
| 1:11 | Where is my wand'ring boy ton*ight!* **[1]** | [3] [4] |
| 1:18 | Down in the licensed saloon. **[1]** | |
| 1:22 | Brother, I guess you'd **enter** this fight, | [4] [5] |
| 1:28 | If it were your boy down there tonight, | [4] |
| 1:32 | Ruined **and wrecked** by the drink appetite, | [5] |
| 1:37 | Down in the licensed saloon. | [4] |
| 1:42 | There is my wand'ring boy tonight, **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:48 | There is my wand'ring boy tonight, **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:54 | Down, down, **[1]** down, down **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:01 | Down in the licensed saloon **[1]** | |
| 2:06 | There is my wand'ring boy tonight, **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:12 | There is my wand'ring boy tonight, **[1]** | |
| 2:18 | Down, down, **[1]** down, down **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:24 | Down in… [cuts off] | |

[105] Ibid.

In this recording, Van Meter sings to organ accompaniment, but her voice is prominent in the mix. Throughout the song, Van Meter pushes her voice in the upper and lower range of the melody. Only a very narrow set of notes allow her voice to relax, like in the refrain "Down in the licensed saloon." Even then, the whole song is characterized by Van Meter's forced, throaty, yell-like timbre. Like Marelle, Van Meter has no control over the dynamics of her performance: as she ascends, she crescendos. Since much of the range sits in the upper portion of her chest register, she reaches for the notes throughout the recording. This is most extreme when the line jumps up for the middle two notes in the four-note "Down, down, down, down" at 0:59 and 2:18; Van Meter screams to sound the notes. Her breaths are frequent, but never break a phrase; the song was designed to allow frequent breaths. Nevertheless, you can hear her struggling to complete a phrase on one breath at "There/Where is my wand'ring boy *tonight*" at 0:46 and 1:11.

The next home recording I've selected is performed by an unknown vocalist. In her recording of "I Know My Heavn'ly Father Knows" by Sarepta M.I. Henry (1839-1900),[106] the vocalist sings with organ accompaniment.

[106] [Brown wax home recording of woman singing I know my heavenly father knows], The David Giovannoni Collection of home cylinder recordings (Set Number: 101-06, Originally acquired: Mike Ellingson, June 2009), accessed December 28, 2016, http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder12807.

Table 1.5. Unknown, "I Know My Heavn'ly Father Knows" (n.d.)

| Time | Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2]) | Other Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **0:04** | I know **[1]** my heav'nly Father knows **[1]** | [4] |
| **0:11** | The storms **[1]** that would my way oppose; **[1]** | |
| **0:18** | But He **[1]** can drive the clouds away, **[1]** | [4] |
| **0:25** | And turns **[1]** my darkness into day. **[1]** | [4] |
| **0:32** | And turns **[1]** my darkness in**[1]**to day **[1]** | [4] |
| **0:41** | Who knows, **[1]** He knows **[1]** | |
| **0:48** | The storms **[1]** that would my way oppose; **[1]** | |
| **0:56** | Who knows, **[1]** He knows, **[1]** | |
| **1:04** | And tempers every wind **[1]** that blows. **[1]** | |
| **1:14** | [clears throat] | |
| **1:18** | I know **[1]** my heav'nly Father knows **[1]** | [4] |
| **1:25** | The balm **[1]** I need to soothe my woes; **[1]** | [4] |
| **1:33** | And with **[1]** His touch of love divine **[1]** | [4] |
| **1:40** | He heals **[1]** this wounded soul of mine. **[1]** | [4] |
| **1:48** | He heals **[1]** this wounded soul **[1]** of mine. **[1]** | |
| **1:58** | Who knows, **[1]** He knows **[1]** | [4] |
| **2:05** | The storms **[1]** that would my way oppose; **[1]** | |
| **2:12** | Who knows, **[1]** He knows, **[1]** | [4] |
| **2:20** | And tempers every wind **[1]** that blows. **[1]** | |

The singer's high range is marked with a seemingly unintentional quaver throughout, in line with Dow's concerns about clavicular breathing and corseting. Her breaths are very frequent, often breaking a phrase or even a word (as in the line "And turns **[1]** my darkness in**[1]**to day **[1]**" at 0:32). Each syllable is sounded with incredible control and precision, as if the singer was extremely concerned with timing and pitch accuracy for the recording. In contrast, the forced quality of her timbre overall, in line with what Cornelius Reid described as "throatiness," is due to her lack of control over her

expiration. Her lack of control over dynamics is very similar to the recordings by Mrs. Van Meter and Marelle (above): as the melody ascends, she crescendos.

And finally, in the last recording I'll analyze for this chapter, Bridget and Carrie Swanson sing without pretension.[107] As they sing Stephen Foster's "Old Black Joe," they sound young, untrained, but mindful to sing with accuracy. Both Bridget and Carrie demonstrate the same pressing of the voice we've heard in all the previous recordings and the throatiness associated with clavicular breathing. This is particularly evident in the upper vocal line, as the vocalist struggles to push her chest voice to its upper limits. Most of Bridget's and Carrie's frequent breaths occur at natural breaks in the sentence structure, except for in the line "I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]**." This song, too, seems to be perfectly amenable to the corseted body in its allowance for frequent breaths. Nonetheless, the recording reveals occasional breathlessness and vocal quavers as Bridget and Carrie struggle to finish lines on uncontrollable exhalations.

Table 1.6. Bridget and Carrie Swanson, "Old Black Joe" (n.d.)

| **Time** | **Upper Voice - Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2])** | **Other Notes** | **Lower Voice - Lyrics with Breaths Marked ([1] or [2])** | **Other Notes** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0:10 | Gone are the days **[1]** | [4] | Gone are the days **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:13 | when my heart was young and gay **[1]** | [4] | when my heart was young and gay **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:21 | Gone are my friends **[1]** | [4] | Gone are my friends **[1]** | |
| 0:24 | from the cotton fields away **[1]** | [4] | from the cotton fields away **[1]** | [4] |

[107] [Black wax home recording of Old black joe, sung by Bridget and Carrie Swanson], The David Giovannoni Collection of home cylinder recordings (Set Number: 102-01, Originally acquired: Jim Ross, June 2009), accessed December 28, 2016, http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder12811.

Table 1.6, cont.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0:30 | Gone from the earth **[1]** | | Gone from the earth **[1]** | |
| 0:34 | to a better land I know **[1]** | [4] | to a better land I know **[1]** | |
| 0:40 | I hear their *gentle voices calling*, **[1]** | [3] [4] | I hear their gentle voices calling, **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:47 | Old Black Joe **[1]** | [4] | Old Black Joe **[1]** | [4] |
| 0:52 | I'm coming, **[1]** I'm coming, **[1]** | | I'm coming, **[1]** I'm coming, **[1]** | |
| 0:58 | for my head is bend*ing low* **[1]** | [3] [4] | for my head is **bend***ing low* **[1]** | [3] [4] [5] |
| 1:04 | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | |
| 1:12 | Old Black Joe **[1]** | | Old Black Joe **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:20 | Where are the hearts **[1]** | | Where are the hearts **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:23 | once so happy and so free **[1]** | [4] | once so happy and so free **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:30 | The children so *dear* **[1]** | [3] | The children so dear **[1]** | |
| 1:33 | that I held upon my knee **[1]** | [4] | that I **held** upon my knee **[1]** | [4] [5] |
| 1:39 | Gone to the shore **[1]** | | Gone to the shore **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:43 | where my soul has longed to go **[1]** | [4] | where my soul has longed to go **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:51 | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | [4] | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | [4] |
| 1:58 | Old Black Joe **[1]** | | Old Black Joe **[1]** | |
| 2:03 | I'm coming, **[1]** I'm coming, **[1]** | | I'm coming, **[1]** I'm coming, **[1]** | |
| 2:08 | for my head is bending low **[1]** | [4] | for my head is bending low **[1]** | [4] |
| 2:15 | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | [4] | I hear their gentle **[1]** voices calling, **[1]** | |
| 2:22 | Old Black Joe **[1]** | | Old Black Joe **[1]** | [4] |

In bringing together findings from physical anthropology, contemporary medical and pedagogical writings, women's binder's volumes, and commercial and home recordings, the sound of the corseted singer and the problems she faced come into focus. Her voice, often strained, out of control, sometimes breathless, and always needing breath, can be perceived in the culmination of these sources: what I hear suggests that the corset throttled the woman's body while limiting her timbral options. As every contemporary pedagogical writer who mentioned corseting warned against it, every singer in the recordings demonstrated some of the effects associated with clavicular breathing and/or corseting flagged by pedagogues.

**The Second Breath: The Modern Singing Voice as Man-Made**

My analysis of the corseted woman's voice comes with significant risks. I fear the possibility of remapping the qualitative baggage of what makes "good" and "bad" singing onto Victorian women's voices. Both past and present pedagogues have decried the results of corseting and/or clavicular breathing on vocal performance. While they frame abdominal breathing as the norm (typical of children and men), they figure clavicular breathing as an unnatural deviation. But, natural by whose standards? And what is the meaning of "natural" within the rules of a singing style which is the clear construct of the nineteenth century?

As pedagogues began to understand timbre as a defining feature of the voice, timbre became more firmly embedded in the "natural" body. In his contribution to the "Why Voice Now?" Colloquy, "Voice Belongs," James Davies writes,

> In the liberal era, the imperative for singers (indeed for everybody) has been to work toward finding that which they supposedly already have. In the church of liberal freedom, the idea is that each of us has a secret entity within us, a living presence that might represent or stand in for us in some way. I have a voice, therefore I am: that seems the shibboleth. The "inner voice" has been made vital to political life and personal representation. In the biocentric conception, this voice involves coming out, articulating "I am here." It is about making bids for power. "The voice" has been made expressive of inviolable self-presence, I-affirming desire, plenitude, anima, the life of survival, a better world. In such models, "the voice" involves what Roland Barthes would call the "song of the natural body" rising up from deep within and making itself heard. There's a mystic sense of an uncontrollable animal-thing dwelling somewhere in the secret darkness within, waiting to be unleashed or summoned in moments of extreme emotional crisis. "My voice." "It is mine."[108]

If the voice were the "song of the natural body," then the corseted Victorian woman would have no voice. To nineteenth-century physiologists, corsetry was an unnatural aberration. Rowley writes,

> When the question of female clothing—and particularly that curse, the corset—is taken into consideration, most of those in the majority either directly or tacitly admit that the difference of the two sexes in breathing is brought about by unnatural conditions on the woman's part, whose clothing prevents the free expansion of the lower ribs, and therefore induces the bad habit of thoracic instead of diaphragmatic breathing.[109]

And more broadly, according to Margaret Beetham, the corset was entangled with "a contradictory discourse of the 'natural.'"[110] She writes that in representations of the female body in nineteenth-century advertising, "womanly beauty was simultaneously guaranteed as natural and—like her health—always threatened and dependent on the

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[108] James Q. Davies, "Voice Belongs," in "Colloquy: Why Voice Now?," convened by Martha Feldman, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 680. Quoting Barthes, "Romantic Song," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 288.
[109] Rowley, 20.
[110] Beetham, 147

constant work of construction and artifice."[111] What was "Natural," according to nineteenth-century pedagogical and physiological writings, was to breathe costally, and thus have the control and vocal sound of the modern singing voice. Corseting, and by association, clavicular breathing, were thus considered unnatural derivatives from the norm.

This is a clear extension of scientific male-as-norm figurations, thoroughly critiqued by second-wave feminists, most famously by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, Luce Irigaray, and Dale Spender. In the Western world, man is taken as the norm, and the female as deviating from it. Spender writes that "By arranging the objects and events of the world according to these rules we set up the rationale, and the vindication, for male supremacy."[112]

While this is now widely recognized, its more far-reaching effects are not always readily evident. Hidden in the breathing and vocal technique associated with the modern classical singing voice are biases based on preferences of the patriarchy. Modern vocal pedagogy, beginning in the 1840s with Manuel Garcia, was formed on the basis of essentialist claims of sexual dimorphism. Though not a natural feature of "sex," breathing associated with men (abdominal breathing) is seen as "natural" and superior while the clavicular breathing associated with women is seen as unnatural and unhealthy. The modern singing voice, then, is built on a foundation of patriarchal constructions of what

[111] Beetham, 147.
[112] Dale Spender, *Man Made Language.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

is "natural" and "healthy" versus what is deviant, and functions as a way of trying to bring the feminine under masculine control.

Since it was recognized by many nineteenth-century writers that this difference was not "natural" but the result of "unnatural" corseting, the Victorian woman was actively deviating from the advice of doctors and voice teachers. Carma Gorman writes,

> Men's dress had been regularized in the nineteenth century according to tenets of "practicability" and "good sense," and the refusal of women to bow to these "rational" principles played, perhaps, to the fears of men…even as it justified the need for male control over women and their bodies.[113]

Because the Victorian woman's corseted body was partially her own construction, created in direct opposition to much medical and vocal pedagogical advice, a better understanding of her sound and its meaning illuminates one of the ways in which she took an active part in the construction of Victorian femininity. And it sheds light on a musical practice which is often discussed but never from her experience, from her body, and never in light of contemporary gendered timbral associations.

The avoidance of the natural, or the recreation of what "nature" means, is a political maneuver familiar to feminism. Donna Haraway writes of second-wave feminists, "We have challenged our traditional assignment to the status of natural objects by becoming anti-natural in our ideology in a way which leaves the life sciences untouched by feminist needs."[114] Perhaps in their own way, Victorian women could be making a similar challenge. Instead of assuming Victorian women's bodies were solely

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[113] Carma R. Gorman, "Fitting Rooms: The Dress Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 274.

[114] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 8.

the result of patriarchy, then, perhaps we might imagine that, just in part and perhaps just for some, corseting was a way of challenging it. Women changed the thing that, for Victorians, was stable and unchangeable: the body. Through corseting, women changed the nature of their bodies. Or, perhaps, we could go so far as to think that through corseting, women formed their own nature, complicating the very idea of what constituted the "natural."

**Conclusion: The Victorian Voice Means**

If timbre gives culturally-informed messages about gender/racial identity and/or status, as has been established by linguists, psychologists, and musicologists, then my main argument in this chapter gives new insights into Victorian timbre's cultural associations. In the nineteenth century, the sound of the corseted body marked a woman as genteel, making the ballad singer and home performer clearly distinct from the tawdry and bold operatic heroines who followed pedagogues' advice and left their corsets off or considerably loosened.[115] Thus not only composed musical qualities (which I'll discuss in more depth in chapter three), but also the material production of sound resulted in sonic associations demarcating virtuous wife and risqué opera singer.

The timbral difference of the corseted body was the sonic equivalent to the visual symbol of the corset: creating and representing the owner's gentility and moral standing, as well as her gender and class status. The contemporary linkages between the physiology of the corseted body and the real impacts on breath and sound developed simultaneously

[115] Polaire, tight-laced to fetishist lengths, is an exoticist figure outside of this binary.

to what Grant Olwage calls "the embourgeoisement of the singing voice [which] brought the idea of othered voices into play."[116] In other words, with the development of the "modern singing voice" around 1840, pedagogues helped create a hierarchy of vocal sound by class. Interestingly, as we've seen, though the corset represents gentility, its resulting sound did *not* in fact fit the "modern singing voice" ideal, but was rather an obstacle to students' adoption of it. I believe, then, that the vocal qualities that sounded from corseted bodies became a sonic marker not of the modern singing voice, and not simply of class since the corset's influence crossed class divisions. The sound of the Victorian corseted body was the sound of ideal womanhood, of which ideal amateurism and frailty were essential parts. I further pursue the ideal of frailty, amateurism, and their linkages to illness, song, and corseting in chapter three.

The previous discussion established the meanings a listener could derive from the sound of the corseted woman; it thus works *from* sound *to* expectations of sight. This association undoubtedly functioned in the opposite way too: from sight to expectations of sound. I believe that the very appearance of a corseted woman would inevitably trigger the contemporary listener's expectations about vocal timbre. This belief follows Richard Leppert's approach to studying visual representations of musical sound. His argument that sound works not only aurally, but visually, reinserts the body and its cultural meanings into analyses of musical meaning. He writes that

> Precisely because musical sound is abstract, intangible, and ethereal—lost as soon as it is gained—the visual experience of its production is crucial to both musicians and audience alike for locating and communicating the place of music and

[116] Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (November 2004): 207.

> musical sound within society and culture. I am suggesting, in other words, that the slippage between the physical activity to produce musical sound and the abstract nature of what is produced creates a semiotic contradiction that is ultimately "resolved" to a significant degree via the agency of human sight.[117]

Sound is made meaningful through connection with the body. What's heard must also be seen (or, I would add, imagined). With the ubiquity of contemporary advice against lacing up due to resulting health, breath, and sound limitations, and the prevalence of singing corseted women, audiences would have undoubtedly linked the corseted body to the corseted voice.

The association of a corseted body with a particular sound is not confined to the Victorians. Because corseting has maintained a stable place in the cultural imaginary of the Western world before and since the Victorian era, the cultural associations among song, voice, and corseting established by the Victorians have largely remained. Thus my early assumption that poor Snow White must have been suffocated by a corset in order to create such a sound. I'm certainly not alone in jumping to this conclusion; online blogs are full of invectives against waist training that appeal to health and breath, and even sometimes to singing. And when audiences see a small waist singing, like Samantha Barks' corseted waist and vocal performance in *Les Misérables*, online discussion boards light up with questions and concerns. The staying power of the association between corseting and vocal sound, health, and breath is perhaps partially due to the staying power of the corset throughout the twentieth century, despite the diminishing numbers of women actually lacing up. But the associations have also remained due to the imaginary

[117] Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), *xx-xxi.*

of corseted womanhood created in popular media: song, film, and novels. I will further discuss the longevity of Victoriana and its associations in popular culture in the conclusion.

In chapter two, I argue that it is not only the listeners/viewers of corseted women performers who expect this sound, but also the creators of the music targeting corseted women consumers: parlor song. Overlaps between parlor song and corseting are everywhere; the materials are entangled through sheet music covers, advertisements, novels, etiquette manuals, journals, and, of course, on women's bodies. As we've seen, because of the peculiarities of the corseted body, composed narrow ranges and short phrases were undoubtedly essential to a successful performance. These musical features just happen to also be the features scholars have associated with parlor song as a genre. Considering the findings of this chapter as a starting point, chapter two investigates the marketing, collection, and uses of music in binder's volumes, searching for connections between mass production, consumption, marketing, and the Victorian body.

# Chapter Two: Bound Women Binding Songs: Binder's Volumes as Self-Fashioning Practices

## Mother's Old Songs

Before returning her mother's bound musical collections to her childhood home, affectionately called "The Apple Trees," Elsie Perkins wrote a note and tucked it inside the front cover:

> Dear Mother:
> Please have these books kept at Burlington and rebound? would you—I appreciate your saying I can have these but I like to think they will always be at Apple Trees—where for years I played and sang through these things.—Your [Musical?] Elsie[118]

In 1920, after returning from service in the First World War, Robert Forbes Perkins visited his oldest sister Plummy in Framingham, Massachusetts. As Robert sat in his sister's parlor, Plummy went to the piano, opened her mother Edith's well-worn song collection, and sang one of Robert's favorites. The performance prompted Robert to write to his mother:

> Dearest mother—Edith is singing that wonderful old song of Moses Williams and ha! What memories it brings back—and then she plays—those old things—or new ones of Charley's—songs of <u>comradeship</u> rather than of wine. But they seem to me in the dim past. I love to hear her play and sing—oh—how happy people were in the days I have known.[119]

Edith Forbes Perkins, mother to Edith (nicknamed Plummy), Elsie, and Robert,

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[118] Elsie Perkins to Edith Forbes Perkins, n.d., Edith Forbes Perkins Bound Collection, Lowerre 278, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston. Thanks to a recent post by Katie Callam, "Nineteenth-Century Bound Sheet Music Volumes Part I: Edith Forbes Perkins Volumes," for the Houghton Library Blog, July 29, 2016, for suggesting "Musical" as Elsie's chosen descriptor. http://blogs.harvard.edu/houghton/2016/07/29/nineteenth-century-bound-sheet-music-volumes-part-i-edith-forbes-perkins-volumes/

[119] Robert Forbes Perkins to Edith Forbes Perkins, April 15, 1920, Vol. 10, p. 6, Edith (Forbes) Perkins Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

collected music and had it bound into three volumes, each embossed with her name. Her daughter Plummy created two more volumes and added them to the family's collection. Despite the fact that the family members were separated by great distances, and Edith herself alternated between Iowa, Massachusetts, Colorado, and California, the volumes, and the "old songs" more generally, were linked in the minds of her husband, children, and friends to Edith, and to the family home in Iowa.

Through the acts of collecting, organizing, and maintaining her musical collection, Edith created and performed her identity as an upper-class white American wife and mother. Musical curation was a common artistic outlet for amateur women performers in the nineteenth-century United States, especially from the 1820s to 1870s,[120] and their resulting collections, called "binder's volumes," provide a valuable record of nineteenth-century musical practices. Scholars like Nicholas Tawa, Candace Bailey, and Petra Meyer-Frazier have discussed these collections, and Bailey, Meyer-Frazier, and Katherine Preston have shown how the music contained within them encouraged the ideal chastity, loving loyalty, and piety expected of Victorian women. However, interpretations often overlook the active role women played in shaping and expressing their own identities through these volumes and the agency of the material artifacts in reifying those identities—identities that were more individual, complicated, and intersectional than often suggested.

[120] Petra Meyer-Frazier, *Bound Music, Unbound Women: The Search for an Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Missoula, MT: The College Music Society, 2015), 4.

This chapter will demonstrate ways in which women actively participated in the construction and performance of their own classed, gendered, and racial identities through musical curation, musical performance, as gleaned from examining several binder's volumes from the 1830s to 1880s. At a time when complicated racial divisions began to coalesce around a black/white binary, a woman used the corset and binder's volume, her personal collection of sheet music, to bind her own conception of whiteness. The covers of her volume, like her corset, constructed and marked the materiality and boundaries of a white middle- to upper-class woman's body. The material products—the sheet music, the binder's volume, the piano, the corset—were ever-present throughout women's lives, themselves playing an active role in reinscribing gendered, racial, and classed identities for generations through ownership and performance.

**The Parlor, The Book, and Identity**

The parlor, sumptuously furnished, outfitted with a piano and adorned with a binder's volume, was the social and pedagogical nexus of the middle- to upper-class home. The genre of music aligned with this space, "parlor song," is generally understood to be simple, often strophic, in a major key with a narrow range and simple accompaniment. Sheet music publishing grew along with the middle class, and Tawa says that by 1860, there were ninety music publishers around the U.S. who put out thousands of simple songs.[121] These simple songs, often dripping with sentimentality, were

[121] Nicholas E. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 102.

marketed toward female consumers, who would perform them for friends and family in the parlor. This was not only a marker of a woman's labor-free gentility (like the corset), but also one of the ways she performed her essential feminine duty to her family: to comfort and entertain through music.

Much of what we know about nineteenth-century U.S. song and its uses is due to the work of Oscar Sonneck, Charles Hamm, and Nicholas Tawa. Tawa's *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans* (1980) brings together years of archival research at Harvard's Theatre Collection and Boston Public Library to trace a thorough history and thematic analysis of parlor song from 1780-1860. The parlor song periodization he established—1780-1810, 1811-1840, and 1841-1860—will be of use in this chapter. While Tawa employs many different types of archival evidence, binder's volumes prove valuable to his study in providing information about musical and even some gestural practices of amateur musicians. Despite Tawa's use of women's collections and his efforts in cataloguing the contents of hundreds of binder's volumes in the Boston collections, there was little continuing interest in them until recently. Scholars like Candace Bailey, Mark Slobin et al., Petra Meyer-Frazier, and George Boziwick represent a recent surge of activity surrounding binder's volumes, and their work has shown how the volumes can complicate our understanding of nineteenth-century domestic music making.

A binder's volume is a collection of sheet music, collected and organized by an individual woman (or rarely a pair or set of sisters), which she then had bound together and often embossed with her name. The practice of collecting and binding music in this

fashion reached its height in the U.S. from the 1820s through the 1870s,[122] though women engaged in the practice from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. Women purchased their sheet music through music stores in their town or as souvenirs from towns they visited; family members, friends, or suitors gifted women sheet music; and women obtained sheet music through their periodical subscriptions.[123]

Katherine Preston notes that women's choice figures little into the music obtained through periodicals,[124] and the same could be said of music given as gifts. However, if a woman received a gift of sheet music that she disliked, the decision to include it in her collection wasn't mandatory. Though she undoubtedly considered the tastes and feelings of her family and friends in her selections, the choices of sheet music, its ordering, flyleaf paper, binding, and embossing seems to have been the woman's.[125] This is evidenced in the volume of Emily Hollingsworth (1815-1895) of Philadelphia, whose instructions for the binding of her musical collection are preserved on the cover of the first song in the volume.[126] Hollingsworth had discerning taste. Her volume, which contains music published from 1826 to 1832, includes the highest number of pieces printed on colored

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[122] Meyer-Frazier, 4.
[123] Bonny H. Miller discusses the music in these publications in detail, including the comparably large number of female composers who published through ladies' periodicals, in her article, "A Mirror of Ages Past: The Publication of Music in Domestic Periodicals." *Notes* 50, no. 3 (March 1994): 883-901.
[124] Katherine K. Preston, "Music in the McKissick Parlor," in *Emily's Songbook: Music in 1850s Albany,* edited by Mark Slobin, et al. (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2011), 15.
[125] Many binder's volumes feature handwritten indexes which might serve to prescribe the ordering of the music to be bound, or perhaps it was sometimes left to the discretion of the binder and the index was made afterward. I'm inclined to believe the former case was by far more prevalent, since the ordering of binder's volumes does not follow a standard procedure, but appears to be up to the individual preferences of the collector.
[126] Emily Hollingsworth Bound Volume, Vol. 586, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

paper of any volume surveyed and Emily carefully wrote her name at the top of each piece. The instructions to the binder are in Emily's hand; she dictates the paper that was to be used for flyleaf and a strict (and fast approaching deadline): "Dark Moroccan paper / [nd], morocco [back], to be done to morro [sic]"[127] (see figure 2.1).

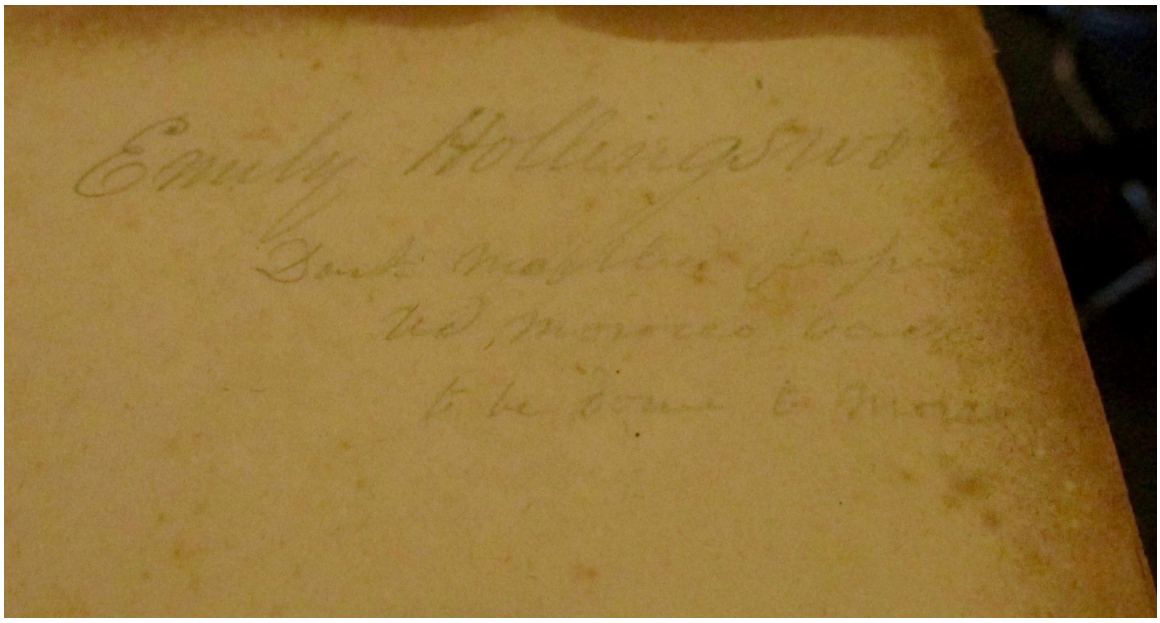

Figure 2.1. Emily Hollingsworth's instructions written to the binder on first cover page. Hollingsworth's volume is held by the Johns Hopkins University Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection (Vol. 586).

Since women controlled the music selected for their binder's volume(s), or at the very least, chose its order and flyleaf and cover design, then we can read each binder's volume for information about a woman's musical taste, musical and identity performance, and relative compliance to social norms. Meyer-Frazier, Bailey, and Boziwick have done remarkable work in this arena, studying binder's volumes to

[127] Emily Hollingsworth's Bound Volume, Vol. 586, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

understand the women and womanly ideals in the Victorian household. Their rigorous research is essential to my understanding of the contents, uses, and meanings of binder's volumes and domestic music making.

Meyer-Frazier's recent book *Bound Music, Unbound Women* is the result of twenty years of her musical and biographical archival work. Using the music contained in each binder's volume, she reanimates the women who so carefully curated them. Meyer-Frazier examines the women's music as necessarily and intrinsically linked to their lives, cultural movements, and sociological pressures. Each volume, she writes, presents a wealth of information, which "proves extraordinary in its own right—as memorabilia, as documents of historical musical taste, and as biography."[128] Boziwick takes a similar approach, focusing on one subject: Emily Dickinson. Boziwick understands the music contained in Dickinson's binder's volume as intimately tied to her poetic output, as well as to both small and more monumental events in her life, like her brother's absence from home.[129]

The work of Candace Bailey, including her 2010 book *Music and the Southern Belle*, shifts the conversation to women's music making in the Antebellum and Civil War South. The limitations Bailey sets on class, race, and region allows her a more nuanced understanding of the particularities of the Southern woman's experience, and sheds light on how the hardships faced throughout the Civil War changed many women's access to the professional world. Though Antebellum Southern values surrounding musical

[128] Meyer-Frazier, 7.
[129] George Boziwick, "Emily Dickinson's Music Book: A Performative Exploration," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 25, no. 1 (2016): 83-105.

performance are very similar to the values of the U.S. as a whole outlined by Meyer-Frazier, the Civil War redefined many Southern women's relationship to music and professionalism. Women were motivated by the hope of serving as useful patriots as well as by the desire to seize new opportunities to free themselves from the strictures of Victorian domestic roles. They organized and performed in fundraiser concerts, and some even became composers. Bailey writes that these changes "would eventually contribute to significant shifts of Southern women's self-perception and their role in southern society."[130] While my survey of binder's volumes include examples from all over the U.S., Bailey's approach to the meaning of binder's volumes in women's lives and identities is of use in this study.

**The Parlor, The Body: Integrating Material Feminisms and Gendered Material Strategies**

In this chapter and in chapter three, I build on the methodological approach of these scholars: I read archival evidence for information about women's performances, and reconstruct their biographies to better understand the binder's volumes' relationships to their owners' lives. But going beyond this, I utilize a material feminist framework to examine the ways in which women's bodies, binder's volumes, and musical creation, publication, and performance are involved in power relations far more complex than usually suggested. Rather than studying the performance of parlor song in a way that reproduces a top-down narrative of patriarchal Victorian America through solely

[130] Candace Bailey, *Music and the Southern Belle: From Accomplished Lady to Confederate Composer* (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 2010), 181.

investigating how published sheet music relates to and influences women's lives, I will enable binder's volumes to voice how women negotiated, and how the volumes themselves influenced, women's identity construction and performance. I am informed by Foucault's insights, understanding a shift increase in discursive power and its control over Victorian sexuality.[131] But rather than assuming the effective control of sheet music and other forms of discourse over female consumers, I argue that women used these discourses to create their own sphere for engagement and enjoyment.

This approach is informed, first, by scholars of American material culture, particularly by the work of June Purvis, and by Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin's "gendered material strategies."[132] These strategies go beyond analyzing the material object as a text for understanding past lives, instead considering "the interaction between the subject and the object" as more valuable "in terms of social, cultural, political, and economic importance."[133] Indeed, scholars of material culture believe studying these interactions is especially important for women historical subjects, whose histories are often otherwise unpreserved. Purvis asserts that "examining the material conditions of women's lives and their experiences of those conditions seems to be the most legitimate way to construct a feminist women's history that has women centre

[131] Michel Foucault, *A History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
[132] Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (Burlington, VT; Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).
[133] Goggin and Tobin, 2.

stage."[134] Giving voice to these beloved objects which had a privileged position within the domestic space highlights the experience and agency of women of the past.

Each object, its uses, and its entanglements with other material goods allow insight into the reliance of Victorian constructs of femininity on consumer culture. As Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield explain,

> Relationships between objects and gender are formed and take place in ways that are so accepted as "normal" as to become "invisible." Thus we sometimes fail to appreciate the effects that particular notions of femininity and masculinity have on the conception, design, advertising, purchase, giving and uses of objects, as well as on their critical and popular reception.[135]

Further, Tobin and Goggin suggest that in studying women's relationship to objects and the social constructs they represent, we should not only consider women's consumer power, but should investigate ways in which women acted as creators of the material objects with which they engaged, and thus exercised some control over their meaning and impact on society.

While this chapter owes much theoretical insight to these historians, I believe we can take our understanding of women's interactions with material goods one step further to consider not only their impact on women's experience and social constructions, but also how through the process of creating material goods, women created their own material bodies. The material goods which are my focus—the corset and the binder's volume—are admittedly only two of countless objects women interacted with on a daily

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[134] June Purvis, "Doing Feminist Women's History: Researching the Lives of Women in the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian England," in *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective,* edited by Mary Maynard and June Purvis (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 185. Quoted in Goggin and Tobin, 3.
[135] Pat Kirkham and Judy Attfield, "Introduction," in *The Gendered Object*, edited by Pat Kirkham (Manchester; New York: Manchester UP, 1996), 1.

basis. But these two objects were intimately connected to the woman collector, and with them, she repeatedly constructed and animated her body.

Insights from material feminist theory, especially from the work of Karen Barad, are useful here in understanding the entanglement of the material and discursive in identity construction and performance. Barad's posthumanist elaboration of performativity takes into account "how the body's materiality—for example, its anatomy and physiology—and other material forces actively matter to the processes of materialization."[136] By accounting for the intra-actions between "material and discursive, social, and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors," Barad writes, we can account for the historicity of bodies, not just of social forces.[137]
Here, I consider the intra-actions of the body, music, musical and identity performance, and material artifacts as a way to grant agency to women amateur performers—to their choices, their bodies, and their material goods— as creators, not merely vessels, of culture.

**Material Girls**

The corset provides an obvious metaphor for the way in which objects impacted the Victorian body, and the ways in which the body-object dyad, in turn, impacted identity performance and identity pedagogy. The corset, marketed through

[136] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2008), 127.
[137] Barad, 127.

advertisements and promoted through images in journals and songs (as we'll see), in one respect represents society's control over women's bodies. Similarly, though musical curation allowed women some agency in identity construction and performance, the materials collected were largely created by men and represented limiting gender ideals. While not overlooking the systems of patriarchy, domination, and control exerted on women from family, writings, and market forces, considerations of the material traces of women's bodily experience allows an examination of the collection and performance of mass-produced forms as a means of self-construction.

The entanglement between a woman and objects began at a young age, with her introduction to not only her first corset, but also to novels, sheet music, the piano, the cross-stitch pattern, and watercolors and canvas. As stated in chapter one, girls were first corseted sometime between age eight and age twelve. Vocal lessons, too, according to Tawa, could begin as early as age eight.[138] But informal lessons could begin even earlier. Bailey writes that "mothers, older sisters, and cousins were often the first teachers of the young. Lessons generally began at the age of ten."[139] Also noting early childhood informal lessons that could take place prior to school or music tutoring, Meyer-Frazier quotes Catharine Beecher, who advised in her 1842 *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, "In the early years of female life, reading, writing, needlework, drawing, and music, should alternate with domestic duties; and one hour a day, devoted to some study in addition to the above pursuits would be all that is needful to prepare them for a thorough education

[138] Tawa, 47.
[139] Bailey, 63.

after growth is attained, and the constitution established."[140] Since, as Meyer-Frazier points out, Beecher also believed girls shouldn't be sent to school until age fourteen, presumably this early education would be undertaken before that age.

Girls' bodies, then, came into song at the same time they were laced into their first corset. Their instrument formed within the confines of the corset's boning and laces. While she did not have a choice in whether or not she interacted with these objects, a typical Victorian girl used the media of the binder's volume and fashion as ways to organize the available material threads of Victorian femininity into a pattern representative of her. She gathered gifts from friends and family with her own chosen purchases to create a representation and performance of her individual identity in dialogue with gender norms and mass-produced goods. But because they were owned and created years before a woman *actually* came of age, the objects were not tokens of adulthood, but instead acted as *preparation for* womanhood: tools she used to make herself (her identity *and* her material body) into a marriageable ideal. When her body was finally solidified into its hourglass, her binder's volume was sent to the binder to be finalized, and she was ready to enter into marriage. And while I maintain that women had a degree of agency in this production of ideal womanhood, the ways in which women's identities were created and performed in dialogue with patriarchal ideals and often man-made arts and goods placed firm limits on this agency. Indeed, in the nineteenth-century imaginary, women were associated with mass culture precisely because, as Andreas

[140] Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 2nd ed. (Boston: T.H. Webb, 1842), 60-61. Quoted in Meyer-Frazier, 97.

Huyssen writes, mass culture carried associations of "essentially feminine" and "'imposed from above,' in a gender-specific sense."[141]

In his book, *After the Great Divide*, Huyssen shows that in the late nineteenth century, the association of mass production, mass culture, and women was firmly rooted in the cultural mindset, while "real, authentic culture [remained] the prerogative of men."[142] Nineteenth-century writers consistently derided mass culture as effeminate and unsophisticated, referring to art forms which Huyssen summarizes as "serialized feuilleton novels, popular and family magazines, the stuff of lending libraries, fictional bestsellers and the like."[143] Rita Felski also discusses the association of women and mass culture, writing that rather than a simple opposition between the modern, avant-garde masculine on the one hand and the traditional, natural, simple feminine on the other, "the changing status of women under conditions of urbanization and industrialization further expressed itself in a metaphorical linking of women with technology and mass production."[144] This association led to frequent imaginings of woman-as-machine, reflecting fears of modernization striking the soft underbelly of society.

Parlor song fits the mass-culture, mass-produced, and feminized framework set up by Huyssen and Felski. Parlor song performance was not the exclusive domain of women, but women's performance was often limited to parlor song and other "light" genres. Thus, parlor song is feminized in part for its association with women's

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[141] Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1986), 48.
[142] Huyssen, 47.
[143] Huyssen, 49-50.
[144] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 20.

performance, and in part because of its mass production, popular appeal, and financial success. But because of its performative nature, parlor song opens up another analytical possibility. The literature analyzed by Huyssen and Felski entertained real women while simultaneously modeling an image of ideal femininity. But parlor song and the corset directly impacted women's bodies, moving them to play, to sing, and to embody often male-created fantasies of women. Through musical performance marked by genre, and an image and vocal sound altered by corseting, women embodied mass culture. This takes Felski's discussion of the woman-as-machine imaginary into a domain with more literal consequences: from a cultural association to its material effect. It extends the association of women with technology to the construction of a female ideal through the continuous performative reproductions of mass-produced art. In this way, women were mass-produced.

This mass production functioned through overt and covert systems that encourage standardization—women's behavior manuals, literature, advertising, beauty pageants, and in the text and on the covers of parlor songs. Women were taught to seek a standard, which is created by advertisements that persuade women that this standard is achievable with the latest perfume, hairstyle, soap, or corset. Indeed, the corset enabled the ultimate standardization of women's bodies, allowing them to attain the ever-shrinking ideal waist and silhouette.

While song and the corset formed and animated women's bodies according to a male-produced script, women's choices and their very presence and material substance worked in counterpoint to that script, adding layers of signification with the rootedness

and weightiness of their materiality. In numerous subtle ways, women's identities, their collections, and their bodies were specifically designed, curated, and bound by the power of their own choice within these structures. Women's agency in this creation was highlighted by the frequent critiques from male journalists, artists, songwriters, and physicians, who often offered negative accounts of women's silly (or even dangerous) dalliances with mass culture and mass-produced objects, like the parlor song and the corset. In the face of overwhelming masculine advice to the contrary, women chose to engage in these practices anyway. The overlapping and often contradictory forces, intentions, and actions should complicate any examination of agency in identity formation and performance.

**The Corset & The Song: Overlaps in Cultural Dialogues and Marketing**

The corset and parlor song were linked through their status as mass-produced objects and through the roles they played in the construction of women's bodies and women's performance of their identities. There are many ways in which these objects also interacted with one another, acting to mutually reinforce one another's ideals and naturalize their connection with womanhood. Corset advertisers made reference to music,[145] and popular music made reference to fashion and corseting. And advertisements for all sorts of material household goods appeared side by side: in journals, newspapers,

[145] See Worcester Corset Pamphlet discussion in Chapter Four.

magazines, and in posters plastered around the city.[146] These overlaps and the sentiments they betray show complicated relationships between women's consumer power, the constrained options made available and visible to them, and women's resulting material realities.

Throughout the century, song (most written by men, marketed to women) provided a platform for debates about women's behavior, specifically, women's taste for fashion and corseting. In some cases, then, a reference contained within one material good functioned to discourage the taste for another. For instance, many songs from the first and second periods of parlor song composition (1780-1840) speak about fashion as a frivolous female obsession.

In response to criticism of corseting at the end of the eighteenth century, James Hook's song "The Little Waist, Defended" (1795) contained in a binder's volume at the Library of Congress,[147] speaks from a woman's point of view, saying that despite men's protestations at the new fashion for small waists, men can't do without women (so presumably, they'll get over their objections):

> In defence [sic] of her sex, sure a woman may speak;
> Pray what is it now that you men would be at?
> Do you think that we mind, each occasion you seek
> To laugh at our dress, little waist and all that?
> No sirs, don't believe it, such nonsense must fall;
> Convinced when we look but a moment about us,
> That whether we're all waist or no waist at all,

[146] An article entitled "Who Permits These Nuisances?" in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 19, 1896 (page 6), complains about the posters along Bedford Avenue, writing "now the view is restrained by fences about eight feet high, plastered with more or less ragged posters in which are shrieked the virtues of beer, ketchup, meal, buckwheat, variety shows, plays, corsets, cheap music, soap, soup, shoes, and other matters that their owners are wild to get rid of."

[147] [Micah or Alicia?] Hawkins' Bound Collection, Call no. A1.M11 Vol. 3, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

You can't for the life of you, men, do without us.

It is silly to sport with our fancies and dress,
When we can subdue whenever we please;
For sure, we've the power, you must all confess,
To make you ask pardon for that on your knees.
Then prithee, dear sirs, leave our short waists alone;
'Tis the whim of the day and we'll have it, don't doubt us;
So give o'er your jesting, and candidly own,
You can't for the life of you, men, do without us.

That women have tongues I believe you all know,
But pray do not force us to put them in use;
For sure, if you give them such freedom to go,
You'll find it a hard thing to stop their abuse.
Besides, look at home on the dress of yourselves,
With your spencers and pantaloons flocking about us;
But I tell you again, O ye confident elves,
You can't for the life of you, men, do without us. [148]

This song provides an excellent condensation of the dizzying tangle of power and agencies involved in song performance: it is written and composed by men, the lyrics are from a woman's point of view defending "the little waist" from men's critiques, but is a piece that a woman would collect and perform. Though also voiced from a woman's perspective, the song "I Won't Be a Nun" (c.1825) in H. Comstock's binder's volume at the Lester Levy Collection, agrees with the critiques that were aligned with men's point of view in "The Little Waist," listing the frivolities of fashion, music, dancing, and flirting as reasons why the singer is unwilling and unable to join a convent:

Now is it not a pity such as pretty girl as I,
Should be sent to a Nunnery to pine away and die;
But I won't be a Nun, No, I won't be a Nun;
I'm so fond of pleasure that I cannot be a Nun.

[148] James Hook, composer; Lyrics by William Upton, "The Little Waist Defended," New York: G. Gilfert & Co., n.d.

I'm sure I cannot tell what the mischief I have done;
But my Mother often tells me that I must be a Nun:
But I won't be a Nun, etc.

I could not bear confinement, no it would not do for me,
For I like to go a shopping to see what I can see:
So I won't be a Nun, etc.

I love to hear men flattering, love fashionable clothes;
I love Music and Dancing and chatting with the beaux:
So I can't be a Nun, etc.

So Mother don't be angry now, but let your Daughter be,
For the Nuns would not like to have a Novice wild as me;
And I can't be a Nun, etc.[149]

Around midcentury, the complaints against corseting shifted from a focus on corseting's frivolity and its association with silly women, to concerns about the fashion's impracticality and negative physical effects. Calls for dress reform became an integral component of the campaign for women's rights. Chapter three will discuss the reformers' arguments in more detail, and chapter four will trace the dress reform movement into its late nineteenth-century flowering. But of relevance here is the specific reform outfit associated with Amelia Jenks Bloomer, who became an iconic figure in popular sheet music publications.

Early public advocacy for dress reform has been traced to writers working for the *Water Cure Journal*, a New York City newspaper associated with the "water cure" health reform movement. For instance, in the October, 1851 issue, Mary Gove Nichols wrote:

> We want truer and more elevated ideas of womanhood. We must have free, noble, healthy mothers, before we can have men. The cramped waist, the crushed vitals, the loaded spine, the trailing skirts, the fettered limbs, the feeble, fearful being, who has no rights but to be maintained, protected, and doctored, can train

[149] "I Won't Be a Nun," New York: N. Thurston, n.d.

> us no Washingtons, Franklins, or Jeffersons, no wise or great men, and no women worthier the name than their mothers. We want women who can break the bonds of custom, who are great enough to be emancipated from all that weakens, degrades, and destroys, and who will teach others the holy lessons of a true freedom, not to be independent of man, but that man and woman should be mutually dependent.[150]

Women's rights leaders at midcentury, led by Bloomer, riffed on developing trends in reform fashions, and designed the "Bloomer Costume," which consisted of a dress with a shortened skirt worn over loose-fitting pants that gathered at the bottom "into a band and buttoned round the ankle."[151]

The iconic Bloomer Costume was adopted by few, but harshly criticized by many through popular media. Popular music existed on both sides of the debate: both supporting and critiquing the Bloomer Costume. The collection and performance of these pieces allowed women to participate in the conversation about how they adorned their bodies within the safe space of their home. Even if they didn't *wear* the Bloomer Costume, they could advocate for change in a relatively inconspicuous way. Indeed, many of these pieces were instrumental, like "Bloomer, or, The New Costume Polka"[152] in the binder's volume of Martha W. Sanderson (Harvard)[153] "published under the patronage of the Bloomers," the "Bloomer Waltz,"[154] and "The Bloomer Schottisch,"

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[150] M.S. Gove Nichols, "Woman the Physician," *Water Cure Journal* 12 (October 1851): 75. Quoted in Susan Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1987), 70.

[151] "Our Costume," *The Lily* 3 (April 1851), 31; "Our Dress," and "The New Costume," *The Lily* 3 (May 1851), 38; "Our Fashion Plate," *The Lily* 4 (January 1852). Quoted in Gayle V. Fischer, "'Pantalets' and 'Turkish Trowsers': Designing Freedom in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States," *Feminist Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 125.

[152] Edward Le Roy, "Bloomer, or, The New Costume Polka" (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1851).

[153] Lowerre 102, Martha W. Sanderson Bound Collection, Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

[154] William Dressler, "Bloomer Waltz" (New York: William Hall & Son, 1851).

which was "Dedicated to Mrs. Bloomer and the ladies in favor of the Bloomer Costume"[155] (figures 2.2 and 2.3). Perhaps the prevalence of instrumental pieces with Bloomer affiliations reflect women's need or desire to partake in the politics of dress reform secretly, to avoid open debate and criticism.



Figures 2.2 and 2.3. Sheet Music Covers showing Bloomer Costume. Left: Edward Le Roy, "Bloomer, or, The New Costume Polka" (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1851) (Box 100, Item 16) right: William Dressler, "The Bloomer Schottisch," (New York: William Hall & Son, 1851). (Box 100, Item 17), Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

[155] William Dressler, "The Bloomer Schottisch" (New York: William Hall & Son, 1851).

"The Bloomer's Complaint (A Very Pathetic Song for the Piano Forte)," (see figure 2.4) however, gave a specific voice to Bloomer advocacy:

Dear me, what a terrible clatter they raise,
Because that old gossip Dame Rumor Declares,
With her hands lifted up in amaze
That I'm coming out as a Bloomer,
That I'm coming out as a Bloomer.

I wonder how often these men must be told
When a woman a notion once seizes,
However they ridicule, lecture or scold,
She'll do, after all, as she pleases,
She'll do, after all, as she pleases.

They know very well that their own fashions change
With each little change of the season,
But Oh! It is "monstrous" and "dreadful" and "strange"
And "out of all manner of reason,"
And "out of all manner of reason."

If we take a fancy to alter our dress,
And come out in style "a la Bloomer,"
To hear what an outcry they make, I confess
Is putting me quite out of humor,
Is putting me quite out of humor.

I'll come out next week, with a wide Bloomer flat
Of a shape that I fancy will fright them,
I had not intended to go quite to that,
But I'll do it now, only to spite them,
But I'll do it now only to spite them.

With my pants "A la Turque,"
And my skirts two feet long
All fitting of course, most completely
These grumblers shall own after all, they are wrong,
And that I, in a Bloomer, look sweetly,
And that I, in a Bloomer, look sweetly. [156]

[156] "The Bloomer's Complaint (A Very Pathetic Song for the Piano Forte)" Philadelphia: A. Fiot, 1851. Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Call no: Box 100, Item 21. http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:100.021

The speaker, here, is induced to wear the Bloomer Costume, not out of concern for her health, but simply because she doesn't want men dictating what she wears. It's her choice that she advocates for, not any specific fashion.


Figure 2.4. "The Bloomer's Complaint (A Very Pathetic Song for the Piano Forte)" Philadelphia: A. Fiot, 1851. Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Call no: Box 100, Item 21.

The use of Bloomer's name as a symbol for the radical branch of the dress reform movement continued into late century, as we'll see in chapter four. Songs on either side of the divide were published into the 1890s, when most linked bloomers to the bicycle craze. For instance, "The Bloomers" by William Potstock and O. Schrage (Chicago, 1894)[157] tells four stories (one for each stanza), about women stealing pants from men, throwing them on, and riding away on their bicycles. While this seems like a negative portrayal of the audacity of Bloomer-clad women, the chorus is from the perspective of a man, saying that the outfits "look enchanting, on you girls":

> Oh! Those bloomers,
> Oh! Those bloomers,
> Look enchanting, on you girls.
> Men admire your attire,
> And to meet you they desire.
> Men admire your attire,
> And to meet you they desire.[158]

Though perhaps this, too, is an argument against the outfit, since it recalls a prevalent fear of the Bloomer Costume's erotic appeal. Indeed, my interpretation is that the employment of the male gaze is used here to level the lofty aims of women's rights advocates.

Similarly, though Arnold Somlyo's "Hurrah for the Girls in Bloomers!" takes a positive take on the bloomer/bicycle craze, like the chorus of "The Bloomers," his second verse is more overtly erotic and perhaps serves as a strike against them:

> Their dress has charms that young and old admire,
> The mashers know it well,
> Perhaps you've heard them tell;

---

[157] William Potstock, composer; lyrics by O. Schrage, "The Bloomers" (Chicago: Wm. Potstock & Co., 1894). Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Call Number: Box 61, Item 8. http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:061.008

[158] Ibid.

They say with rapture
As they pass the wire,
The little flirts in naughty skirts,
They set our hearts afire.
And the dudes with collars high
And turned up pants,
They watch their chance,
To meet their glance;
They watch their chance,
To meet their glance;
A smile, a glance,
But never get a chance.[159]

Since it would have been mostly women who owned and performed these pieces, the overt sexualization of an outfit meant for practicality and representative of women's increased freedom is particularly striking, and adds to my belief that the pieces would have been meant as mockery by "Traditionalists," not as advocacy.

Another fashion that received much attention in parlor song was a fashion called "The Grecian Bend." In the 1860s, the fashion for large bustles in addition to tight corsets and high heels forced women's bodies into an exaggerated forward stoop which received the pejorative nickname, the Grecian Bend. Seen as a particularly ridiculous development from people on every side of the dress reform debate, songs proliferated that either mocked or seriously decried the fashion. Though I have yet to encounter a song in favor of the "Grecian Bend," the sheer amount of comment it garnered indicates that it had to have had many followers. Edith Forbes Perkins, who was politically conservative and opposed to the women's rights and dress reform movements, included William Horace

[159] Arnold Somlyo, composer and lyricist, "Hurrah for the Girls in Bloomers!" (Chicago: S. Brainard's Sons Co., 1894). Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Call Number: Box 61, Item 40. http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:061.040

Lingard's song and chorus "The Grecian Bend"[160] (1868) in one of her volumes (see figure 2.5).[161] In performance of this song, Edith mockingly embodied the flirtatious follower of fashion:

> Good ev'ning to you one and all,
> I hope I don't intrude;
> Dress'd in this quiet fashion,
> Pray do not think me rude.
> I always study Le Follet,
> The fashion to amend
> So introduce you Ladies to
> This graceful Grecian Bend.
>
> The Grecian Bend, As I now show,
> You must admit, Is all the go.
> The head well forward
> And the body you extend,
> To be perfect in the Grecian Bend.
>
> 'Twas raining hard the other day,
> So I got into a stage,
> Some little boys began to shout
> Which put me in a rage,
> The driver too, said, really Miss,
> You've room enough for ten
> And actually charg'd me double,
> On account of my Grecian Bend.
>
> *Dialogue.—I wouldn't minded it so much only there was, Ann Jenkins who lives next door to me, in the same Stage, she began to laugh at me, she's been practicing the Grecian Bend for three weeks but she cant do it, she's jealous of me because I took her young man away. One Gent had the audacity to tell me that the Grecian Bend was nothing more or less than a spasmodic movement of the third rib in connection with the left shoulder. In fact I need not tell you that…*
>
> The Grecian Bend, As I now show,
> You must admit, Is all the go.
> The head well forward

[160] William Horace Lingard, "The Grecian Bend" (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1868).
[161] Edith Forbes Perkins' Bound Collection, Lowerre 283, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

And the body you extend,
To be perfect in the Grecian Bend.[162]


Figure 2.5. William Horace Lingard, "The Grecian Bend" (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1868). Box 52, Item 2, Lester Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Also contained in one of Edith Forbes Perkins' Binder's Volumes, Lowerre 283, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

[162] Though originally encountered in Edith Forbes Perkins' Binder's Volume, Lowerre 283, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston; the song is available online through the SUNY Digital Repository (SMUS 636): https://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/handle/1951/65902?show=full.

**Corseted Cover Girls**

Though the majority of songs that directly reference fashion trends mocks them as frivolous, song publishers appropriated the corseted female form to appeal to their woman consumers. Clearly, mocking fashion trends through song didn't often translate into women actually rebuffing them.

After Bass Otis, the first U.S. lithographer, established his practice in 1819, lithographed sheet music covers proliferated: their popularity mirrored the practice of creating binder's volumes, reaching their height from the 1820s to 1870s.[163] Thus, as a woman collected parlor song, she also collected a relatively inexpensive form of popular art. In Lester Levy's study of sheet music covers, he discusses them as a democratic art form; they were accessible for a wide portion of U.S. society and "[told] stories, or picture men, places, and the mores of times when there was no other medium to record pictorially the event, or the individual, or the characteristics of that particular period in that particular way."[164] However covers were often intended to appeal to their largely *female* consumer base. Tawa says that the "decorative title pages" and tinted and sometimes even scented paper used for sheet music were intended by publishers as an "inducement to ladies."[165] This is undoubtedly the case, since decorative cover pages are commonly foregrounded within women's bound collections, and some women, like

[163] Lester Levy, *Picture the Songs: Lithographs from the Sheet Music of Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 1-2.
[164] Levy, 3.
[165] Tawa, 104.

Emily Hollingsworth, had a disproportionate number of songs printed on colored paper in their collections.

The sheer amount of corseted figures on sheet music covers, then, suggests that publishers believed it was the ideal image to capture women's attention and imagination. They were right. Women purchased and were gifted these images in large quantities, as evidenced by their frequent presence in the binder's volumes. The existence of this art form in connection with sheet music encouraged a woman to not only admire the woman of the lithograph, but also to enact the fantasy she represented through musical performance. The music was a script which allowed her to embody the (often nameless) character.

Mollie Burroughs Styron (1839-1918) of Virginia often elaborated songs into acted (staged?) musicales with her siblings and cousins, evidenced by penciled-in cast lists on their covers (see figure 2.6).[166] On the cover of Stephen Foster's "Willie, We Have Missed You" (1854), either Mollie or her cousin, Kate Burroughs, wrote "Kate" on the sketch's arm (figure 2.7), anchoring the young woman's musical performance to the wasp-waisted woman of the lithograph. More examples of women's identification with specific *foreign* ballad singers and dancers, shown below, will continue to demonstrate how it was common for women to make this connection: to link their own bodies to the material sheet music through the cover sketch. Through singing and acting according to the sheet music, women could engage in the fantasy depicted on the cover, making the

[166] O.M. Styron Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 281, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C.

image a sort of (more or less private) minstrel mask with more or less problematic implications. And since the sketches touted tiny waists, they functioned to encourage the ideal silhouette only available through the means of corseting. So, as the music animated the woman's body, the cover image not only enabled the transportation of the woman out of her body into the body of fantasy, but also contributed to the real alteration of her actual body to make that fantasy material.

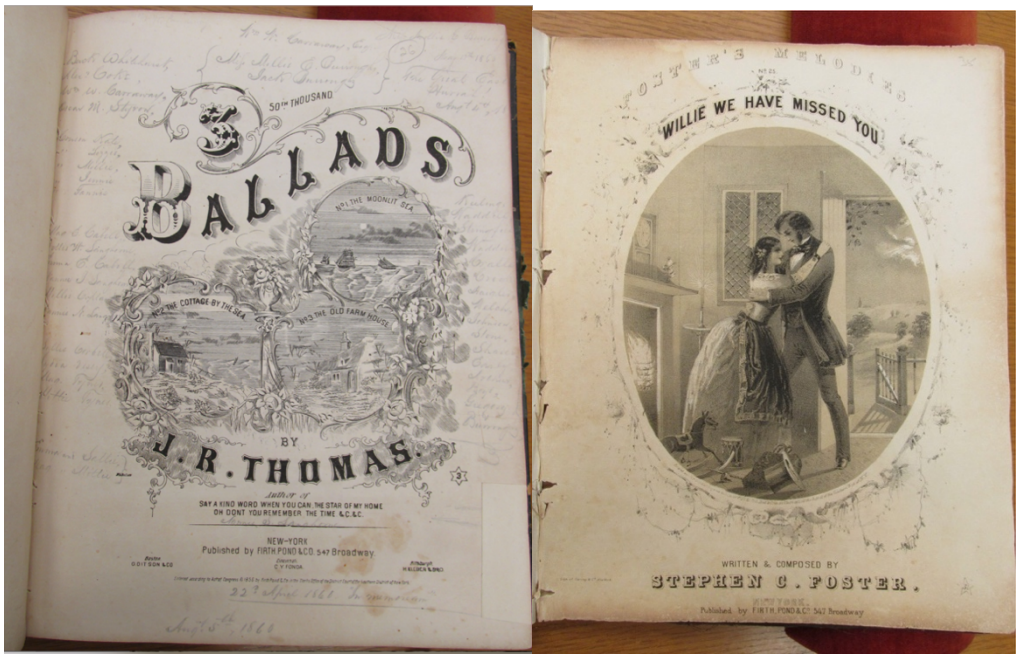



Figure 2.6 and 2.7. Mollie Burroughs Styron (O.M. Styron Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 281, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C.) On left: penciled-in cast list on J.R. Thomas' *3 Ballads:* "The Cottage by the Sea" (New York: Firth, Pond, & CO., 1859). On right: Styron often elaborated songs into musicales with her siblings and cousins, often identifying a sort of cast list for characters in songs on their covers. For instance, she identified her cousin Kate as the wasp-waisted woman depicted on this cover, Stephen Foster's "Willie, We Have Missed You" (1854), and wrote "Kate" on the sketch's arm.

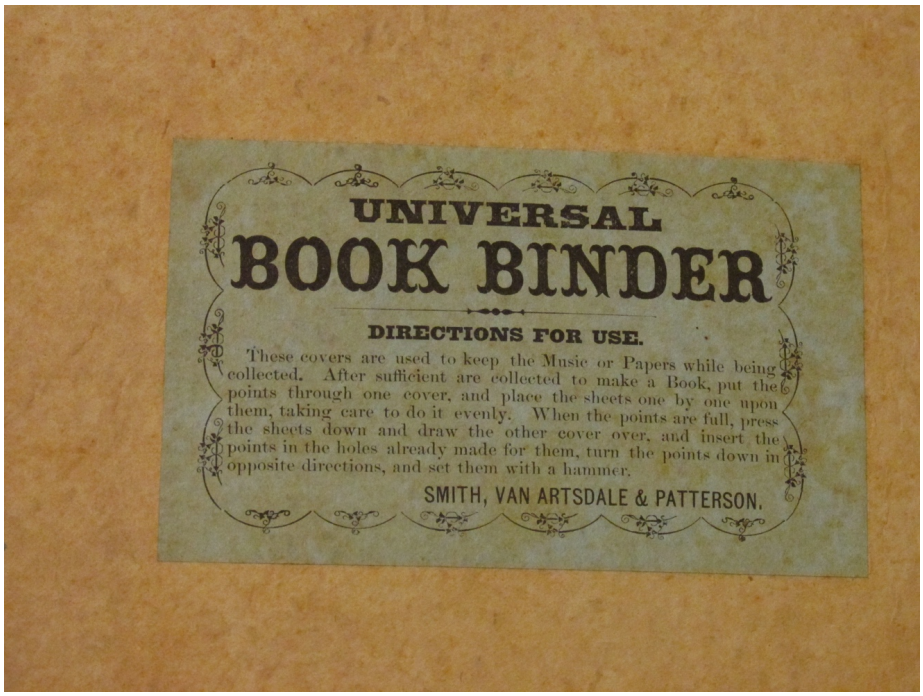
**The Binder's Volume as a Marker of Class and Status**

I have argued that the sheet music contained in binder's volumes enabled and shaped women's fantasized and real bodies and identity performances. I will now examine how women actively used musical curation as a means to construct and perform their own identities in dialogue with the social structures of the nineteenth-century U.S. As has been shown by Meyer-Frazier, simply possessing a binder's volume marked the owner as a middle- to upper-class woman. It suggested her family had the money to purchase music and pay for the binding, and further, that they could afford to purchase and maintain a piano. It showed that she had the time to commit to musical performance, a proper upbringing that included music lessons, and a willingness to perform her feminine gentility at the request of friends or family.

Closer inspection of the binder's volumes reveals more subtlety in the material traces of classed performances in the volumes. Inside the front cover of an anonymous volume held at Johns Hopkins University's Lester Levy Collection is a tag that reads: "Universal Book Binder – Directions for use: These covers are used to keep the Music or Papers while being collected. After sufficient are collected to make a Book, put the points through the cover, and place the sheets one by one upon them, taking care to do it evenly…," and it was signed "Smith, Van Artsdale & Patterson" (see figure 2.8).[167] This "universal" method of binding made it possible for women like the owner of this volume to replicate the practices of women like Edith Forbes Perkins (the mother from the opening vignette), who by the end of the next decade was one of the richest women in the

[167] Vol. 587, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

country. In this bind-it-yourself volume, the owner's name isn't embossed on the cover, and the music is remarkable for its complete lack of annotations or performance markings. This reveals a desire to preserve that suggests that the music was not as easily obtained for this owner as for the Forbes Perkins, whose music is marked with names, performance markings, records of performances, personal and family preferences, etc. on almost every page. And sheet music was expensive: from fifteen cents to over a dollar per song.[168] Despite its lack of personalizing markers, though, the anonymous volume still serves as a sign of the owner's gentility.




Figures 2.8. "Universal Book Binder" tag inside the front cover of Anonymous Bound Music Collection, Vol. 587, Lester Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

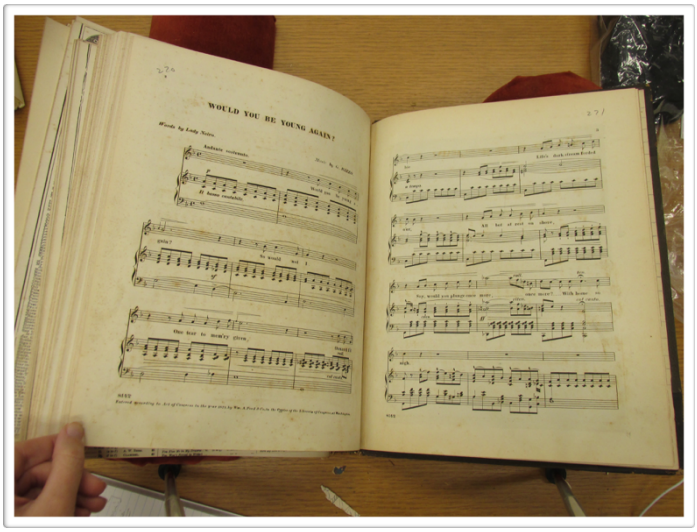
[168] Petra Meyer-Frazier, *American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections: 1820-1870* (PhD Diss, University of Colorado, 1999), 187.

While previous scholars like Meyer-Frazier show how the ability of a woman to collect music, as well as the music she collected, reflected a woman's class and gendered status, they do not investigate how women's curation was itself a form of artistic identity construction. The use of the volume as identity construction is particularly evident in a volume owned by the Lynch family, in which the songs from an original volume were re-bound: handwritten page numbers in the upper right-hand corners are now out of order. The reordering places William Adrian Smith's "Silver Hair that Once was Gold" as the first cover you see upon opening the book. (You can see the number "43" at the top right of the page in figure 2.9). And the last song in the collection is G. Rizzo's "Would You be Young Again?" (figure 2.10).[169] Thus perhaps the changes made to the volume were intended to better reflect an aging woman's shifting identity.

Another connection between organizational choices and identity is clear in the volume owned by Elizabeth Jeffries Sangston, whose portrait bears an uncanny resemblance to the first cover page included in the volume. Figure 2.11 shows the portrait of Sangston that was donated along with the volume to the Lester Levy collection, alongside figure 2.12, the cover of the first song in her collection.[170]

These examples suggest that the ordering of binder's volumes is often dependent upon their use as display pieces reflective of their owner, not unlike a bookshelf in your home made available to guests' perusal.

[169] Lynch Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 7, Music Division, Library of Congress.
[170] Elizabeth Jeffries Sangston Bound Collection, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.


Figures 2.9 and 2.10. First cover (top) and last song (bottom) that appears first in the Lynch Bound Collection, call no. M1.A15 vol. 7, Music Division, Library of Congress.


Figures 2.11 and 2.12. Comparison of cover page of first song in Elizabeth Jeffries Sangston's bound music volume, Mr. Wood's "False One, I Love Thee Still!" with a portrait of Sangston, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University.

**The Binder's Volume as Racial Performance**

A binder's volume provided a means for a woman's self-construction and identity performance, and also enabled breaks into fantasy and identity play as embellishments to that identity. It's then interesting to note the prevalence of sheet music covers that reference and idealize specific European performers like Jenny Lind. Or to consider that most binder's volumes contain an abundance of "Irish" musical and textual tropes and even some minstrel tunes either in their original form or in adaptation. These inclusions open up questions about women's negotiation of their own ethnic and racial identities in dialogue with shifting boundaries of whiteness. When discussing the mid-nineteenth century, speaking in terms of "white" and "whiteness" is complicated because race was

not always fully determined by skin color.[171] Scholars like David Roediger, Alexander Saxton, Theodore Allen, and Matthew Frye Jacobson have traced the historical construction of whiteness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the arrival of large numbers of immigrant groups in the U.S. supported a racial system in which ethnicity defined one's race: Yankee, Italian, Irish, German, Swiss, Russian, etc. In the period during and after the Civil War, ethnic divisions were beginning to give way to a racial system along color lines, as the dominant white population feared the aftermath of Abolition. As demonstrated by Janet Davis in her study of circus performances, and Gillian Rodger in her study of variety theatre, performances among immigrant groups "helped consolidate a shared sense of white racial privilege among its diverse, white ethnic audiences… it codified European ethnicity as racial difference, while simultaneously promoting a uniform 'white' American racial identity."[172] Binder's volumes functioned in a similar way for individual women owners.

Jenny Lind is the most frequently referenced ethnic Other in the volumes, and, through her common billing as the "Swedish Nightingale" was marked for her ethnic and national Otherness (see figures 2.13 and 2.14). But her prominent position in the volumes and her idealized portrayals show performers' identification with the foreign singer. Women bought songs associated with Lind's image and performances so that they could look and sound like Lind. George Boziwick includes a telling excerpt from a letter Emily Dickinson wrote to her brother Austin on July 6, 1851, in which she describes the

[171] Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 26.
[172] Davis, 26.

Otherness of Jenny Lind:

> How we all loved Jenny Lind, but not accustomed oft to her manner of singing did'nt [sic] fancy *that* so well as we did her—no doubt it was very fine—but take some notes from her "Echo"—the Bird songs from the "Bird Song" and some of her curious trills, and I'd rather have a Yankee.
>
> *Herself*, and not her music, was what we seemed to love—she has an air of *exile* in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends—"Give me my thatched cottage" as she sang grew so earnest she seemed half lost in song and for a transient time I fancied she *had* found it and would be seen "na mair," and then her foreign accent made her again a wanderer.[173]


Figures 2.13 and 2.14. Comparison of cover page to Jules Benedict's "Jenny Lind's Greeting to America" (New York, 1850) (Library of Congress Music Division) and a daguerreotype negative of Jenny Lind dated between 1855 and 1865 (Library of Congress Brady-Handy Photograph Collection).

[173] Emily Dickinson, Letter no. 46, in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958). Quoted in Boziwick, 87.

The abundance of sheet music published with Jenny Lind's name and/or image allowed women to reproduce foreign appeal at home. This identification with a foreign performer is seen most overtly on Belle Judson's copy of "I love thee Ah! How well," which was sold with a cover image of Austrian mezzo-soprano Jetty Treffz. Belle so closely identified with Treffz's image, she signed her name across her chest (figure 2.15).[174] Belle imagined herself as Treffz, and engaged in a fantasy through performance that momentarily linked their identities. This demonstrates white Europeans' comparatively privileged position in an identity politics beginning to count ethnic Others as racially white. Through the inclusion of European performers popular in the U.S., women's bound songs served to bind whiteness.

Though each European performer or ethnic association is visually and/or textually marked as different, the music is standard parlor fare: often composed of a solo vocal line with dotted rhythms, short phrases, and a narrow range in a slow tempo, accompanied by a simple chordal piano accompaniment. The lack of difference in the musical figures between Irish songs, songs associated with European ballad singers, and other "unmarked" songs reflects a sense of shared white identity. By collecting these songs and performing them without distinction, women constructed their own racial identities a part of a musically uniform "white" race.

[174] Belle Judson Bound Collection, Lowerre 300, Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

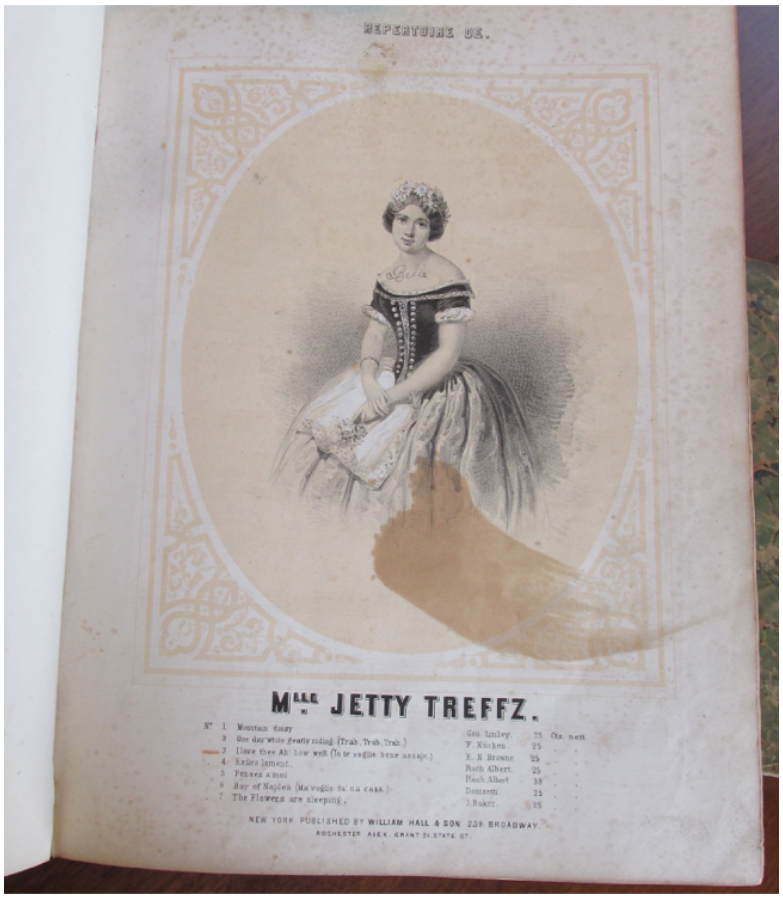



Figure 2.15. Belle Judson's copy of "I love thee Ah! How well," with Belle's name written on Jetty Treffz' portrait. Belle Judson Bound Collection, Lowerre 300, Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

## Case Studies

### 1. Caroline Parker Kimball Gerrish

Looking at a Civil War era binder's volume collected by Caroline Parker Kimball Gerrish (1836-1899), we can imagine Irish songs in practice. Caroline's musical collection contains several songs marking "Irish" characters and dialect, like "Auld Robin

Gray," "Norah the Pride of Kildare" and "The Lament of the Irish Emigrant."[175] Caroline's idea of Irishness was in part informed by these constructions, and she embodied these caricatures through performance for her family and friends, as did her sisters, her daughter, and her nieces.

After her husband died from a Civil War battle injury, Caroline moved with her two children to live with her parents in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She found herself again inhabiting the same spaces as her parents, her grown siblings, and now two nieces. She was also reunited with her parents' long-time servant, Honora Falbey, who had emigrated from Ireland, as can be seen listed in the 1880 census record.[176] I don't know whether or not Honora was present to hear Caroline's parlor song performances, or if she was, what she thought of them. But I think it's important to consider that Caroline, like many other women who collected and performed Irishness, had close, daily interactions with Irish working-class immigrants like Honora. Working-class immigrants were welcome into the home just as they were included in the binder's volumes: welcome for their whiteness, but separate for their ethnic and class difference.

**2. Elvira Sheridan Badger**

Elvira Sheridan Badger (1832-1911), whose two binder's volumes and numerous diaries are available at the Newberry Library in Chicago, is a particularly interesting study in perceptions of Irishness among the upwardly-mobile. Elvira was born April 4, 1832 in Charleston, South Carolina. Her father, John Sheridan (1798-1880) emigrated

[175] Caroline Parker Kimball Gerrish Bound Volume, Personal Collection.
[176] *1880 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Portsmouth, NH (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010).

from Dublin to the U.S. in 1824 and initially worked as a cabinetmaker in South Carolina. He met and married Martha Washington Moore (1804-1887), a daughter of "one of the most cultured and elegant families of that State"[177] in his first year in the U.S., and together they had Elvira, along with two other daughters and a son. The family moved to Louisville in the mid-1830s, where John made several successful real estate investments, but lost almost nearly everything in the panics of 1836.[178] Eventually, he was able to regain financial stability, and by the time of his death in 1880, an obituary published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported him to be one of the most prominent men in Louisville "interested in many of the most prominent enterprises of the city."[179] It seems likely that Elvira's early marriage into a very affluent family helped her father reestablish his own wealth. Considered a great beauty, Elvira entertained many suitors in her family home throughout her adolescence. It must have been mostly her beauty—and not wealth—that recommended her, since at the time of her marriage in 1850, her father was working as a cabinetmaker with no real estate holdings.

Flipping through Elvira's binder's volumes gives a glimpse into the thrilling life she must have led as a young woman. Despite her family's financial troubles, Elvira collected two binder's volumes full of music. Much of the music contained in her binder's volumes were gifts from a variety of men, whose names are written on the covers: D.M.P. Faulds, E.L. Cronby, James Fernstall, James T. Cox, V.M.G. Peters, D.J.B. Clements, Norman Gant, and of course, her eventual husband A.C. Badger.

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[177] Obituary of Mr. John Joseph Sheridan, *Chicago Daily Tribune,* August 8, 1880.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

Faulds, Cronby, Fernstall, Cox, Peters, Clements, and Gant gave her sentimental songs like "My Beautiful! My Fair!" and "The Spell is Broken, or My Heart is like the Faded Flower." But Alpheus Camillus ("A.C.") Badger gave her only instrumental pieces, with no obvious sentimental meaning, like "The Canary Bird Waltz," "The French Guards Waltz," and "The Matamoras Grand March." Perhaps it was A.C.'s more subtle approach that appealed to Elvira, but more likely, Elvira just realized that A.C. could provide her the most comfortable life, because at age 18 she married the highly eligible young man on November 20, 1850.[180]

A.C. was from Chelsea, NH, where he attended school until the age of 15. While he was preparing to enter college, his uncle James Hutchins suggested that he instead join him in the banking industry in Louisville, which would be better for A.C.'s poor health. A.C. agreed and joined his uncle, eventually becoming a partner of A.D. Hunt & Company.[181] Elvira and A.C. had seven children, five of which survived into adulthood: Belle, Ava, Mary Virginia, Ada, Sheridan, Alpheus "Shreve", and Abraham Hunt.[182] The family relocated to Chicago in 1853, partially due to A.C.'s abolitionist beliefs, and A.C. set up an extremely successful banking business there. So successful, in fact, that he turned down a commission from Abraham Lincoln to work to refinance the Confederate States after the war.[183]

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[180] 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Louisville District 2, Jefferson County, Kentucky (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010).
[181] Alpheus Shreve Badger Narrative, Box 1, Folder 6, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.
[182] Discussion of the Badger family, especially the children, will continue in chapter three.
[183] Alpheus Shreve Badger Narrative, Box 1, Folder 6, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

As an upwardly mobile young wife and mother, Elvira felt the need to distance herself from her paternal Irish heritage. In the census of 1850, when Elvira still lived at home with her parents and her father was working as a cabinetmaker, he accurately gave his birthplace as "Ireland" (figure 2.16).[184] After Elvira's marriage and subsequent jump up the wealth and societal ladder, she thereafter always claimed her father's birthplace as "England" (as can be seen in the 1880 and 1910 federal census records, figures 2.17 and 2.18).[185] Indeed, in the biography of Alpheus Shreve Badger included in *American Lumberman* (1906), the author writes that Alpheus's grandfather "came from London, England."[186] While in 1880, the only household servant the Badgers listed in the census records was Nancy Moore (age 50) from Kentucky,[187] in 1900, they had two servants: Katharine O'Donnell (age 25) and Bridget McGuire (age 45), both of whom had emigrated from Ireland.[188]

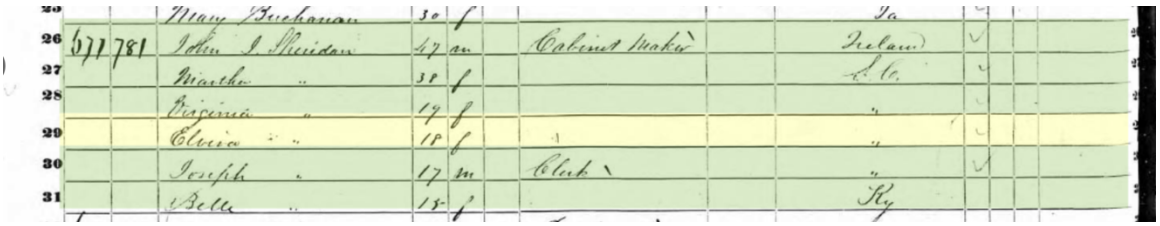


Figure 2.16. 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Louisville District 2, Jefferson County, Kentucky, accessed via Ancestry.com. Showing family of John and Martha Sheridan, parents of Elvira.

[184] 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Louisville District 2, Jefferson County, Kentucky (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010).
[185] 1880 U.S. Federal Census [database on-line], District 018, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010); and *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Cook Co., Illinois (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006).
[186] *American Lumbermen: The Personal History and Public and Business Achievements of One Hundred Eminent Lumbermen of the United States*, Third Series (Chicago: The American Lumberman, 1906), 402.
[187] 1880 U.S. Federal Census, District 018, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, accessed via Ancestry.com.
[188] 1900 U.S. Federal Census, District 1174, New Trier, Cook County, Illinois, accessed via Ancestry.com.

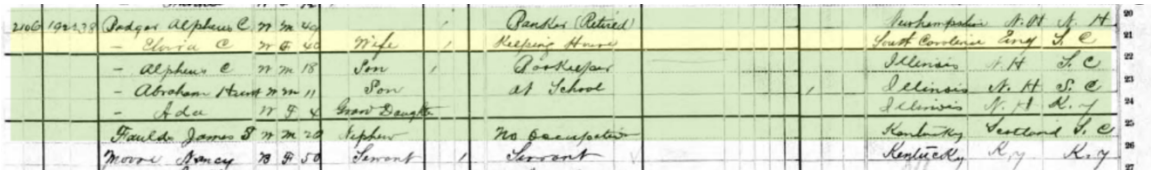


Figure 2.17. 1880 U.S. Federal Census, District 018, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, accessed via Ancestry.com. Shows census information for the family of Elvira Sheridan Badger. Note her father's birthplace has been noted as "England"

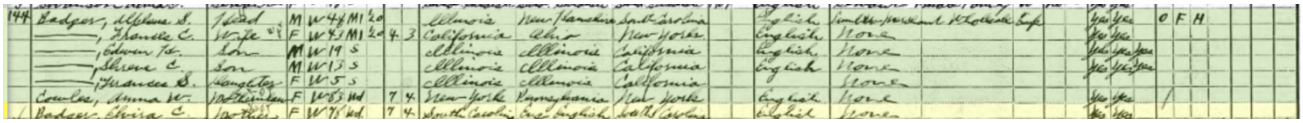


Figure 2.18. 1910 Federal Census, Cook Co., Illinois, via Ancestry.com. showing information for the family of Elvira Sheridan Badger's son, Alpheus Shreve Badger and his wife Frances. Note Elvira's father's birthplace has been recorded as "Eng. English"

Perhaps solely through her personal attributes, Elvira had been the belle of her community and married well, raising her family's status with her own. She felt it was necessary to claim English, rather than Irish lineage to maintain this new status. Her mother, after all, had solid familial connections back in South Carolina, and no one in Chicago would know anything about her father's lineage. While all women negotiated their racial identities through their binder's volumes, Elvira's construction was a reflection of a desperate distancing of her paternal lineage for a clearer performance of whiteness.

Elvira's binder's volumes contain a typical amount of songs that reference ethnic and racial Others. There is little difference between her musical collection and the collections of young ladies without Othered ethnic affiliations. Some allusions to

Irishness in Elvira's volumes, like "The Lament of the Irish Emigrant," were gifts. But there are also some standard "Irish" songs, like songs on texts by Thomas Moore, that Elvira presumably selected for herself. The only allusion to the blackface minstrelsy tradition in Elvira's volumes, a copy of the "Ethiopian Quadrilles," was, interestingly, a gift from her father in 1846. Considering what we know about Irish immigrants' use of blackface minstrelsy, this gift perhaps represents her father's subtle attempt to align himself and his children with a unifying whiteness.

Whiteness was constructed, idealized, and sentimentalized in women's collections. Seen in this light, the volumes are incredibly valuable for their unique portrayal of white *women's* negotiations of their own racial identities, since the creators, performers, and audiences for "ethnic" caricatures in variety theatre were largely male. This discussion fits well within cultural studies of the historical construction of whiteness, not creating a different image of what whiteness meant in this time period, but providing a better understanding of how whiteness was (and is) constructed and confirmed. I argue that women's constructions and performances within private spaces, often overlooked in favor of public, male-driven constructions, are powerful tools in creating and teaching identity.

**Binding Black Bodies: Evidence of Minstrelsy in Binder's Volumes**

Scholars of blackface minstrelsy have long suggested that minstrel shows, in their heyday, were the domain of men: audiences and performers were largely young white working class men in the North, though some groups like the Buckley's Serenaders and

Ethiopian Serenaders eventually presented more "refined" fare palatable to the elite classes and families. This is because, as the story goes, both minstrelsy as sheet music and public performance would have been considered inappropriate for middle- to upper-class women.

Landmark studies by Dale Cockrell and Eric Lott describe blackface minstrelsy as a "'manly' preserve, a sphere of traditional male prowess and bravado…"[189] through which performers enact a cultural negotiation "between men."[190] And the reason for this gender exclusion was established early, through scholar's encounters with Victorian etiquette writers who thought minstrelsy unfit for genteel womanly ears and bodies. This evidence led Judith Tick, in her *American Women Composers Before 1870*, to write "dialect songs and minstrel music were considered too crude and vulgar for accomplished ladies; besides, women were excluded from the minstrel stage until the 1860s."[191]

This assumption was taken up by subsequent scholars and frequently repeated, even into more recent scholarship on minstrelsy. Like *Raising Cain* by W.T. Lhamon (1998)[192] and the 2012 collection *Burnt Cork*, in which Stephen Johnson summarizes the blackface tradition as "when white men (and black men, and sometimes women) applied a coal-black makeup made from burnt cork, and behaved in front of an audience as if

[189] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface, Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 89.
[190] Lott, 51.
[191] Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1979; 1995), 93.
[192] W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 1998), 132.

they were African Americans."[193] Johnson repeats this parenthetical nod to women in the minstrelsy audience in his contributed chapter, but no further discussion of this comment is present in the volume. In John Strausbaugh's *Black Like You* (2006) he recycles the myth of the "stuffy parlor" describing its music from the 1820 to the 1840s as "awfully stodgy. The music approved by the middle and upper classes came in three basic, equally stuffy forms: church music; classical or pseudoclassical music imported from Europe; and wan, sickly-sweet parlor-room ballads."[194] But after the 1840s, Strausbaugh repeats, minstrelsy was cleaned up to suit the parlor.

In her recent book, *Bound Songs, Unbound Women*, Petra Meyer-Frazier extends this argument into her study of binder's volumes. She writes, "Minstrel music would not have been seemly to hand out in pedagogical settings or during courtship rituals nor acceptable for the younger adolescents."[195] She later refines her argument to distinguish between "plantation songs" and "minstrel songs" noting that more "subdued" songs like "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" might have been acceptable, while "songs that are strongly associated with the terms 'blackface' and 'minstrel,' such as 'Jim Crow,' are not."[196] Stephanie Dunson[197] and Nicholas Tawa also show that minstrelsy *only* made its

[193] Stephen Johnson, "Introduction: The Persistence of Blackface and the Minstrel Tradition," in *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*, edited by Stephen Johnson (Amherst; Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 2.
[194] John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (London: Penguin, 2006), 73.
[195] Meyer-Frazier, *Bound Music, Unbound Women*, 6.
[196] Meyer-Frazier, *Bound Music, Unbound Women*, 82.
[197] Stephanie Dunson, "The minstrel in the parlor: Nineteenth-century sheet music and the domestication of blackface minstrelsy," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2002): 241–253.

way into the parlor if it was altered to be more genteel, and so minstrel tunes were often re-texted for use in home performance, like "By the Lake Where Droop'd the Willow."[198]

While scholars note the popularity of dime minstrelsy songbooks and re-texted tunes as ways in which minstrelsy infiltrated the middle-class parlor, and some hint at (rare) instances in which women might have been involved in the tradition, scholars of minstrelsy and parlor song never investigate women's interactions, performances, or experience of minstrelsy. And it seems to me an intentional silence, since even as early as Lott's book, you can perceive them, peeking unheeded between the cracks of his narrative: in primary source quotes, in photos, and in scanned sheet music covers. For instance, in discussing the rise in the popularity of minstrel tunes, Lott quotes an 1845 discussion by James Kennard Jr., who wrote: "Even the fair sex did not escape the contagion: the tunes were set to music for the piano-forte, and nearly every young lady in the Union, and in the United Kingdom, played and sang, if she did not *jump,* 'Jim Crow.'"[199] This quote, though not discussed as evidence for women's activities, directly contradicts Meyer-Frazier's assertion that women would not sing, much less *jump* "Jim Crow." Lott, in a move mirrored by later scholars, instead uses the quote as an example of minstrelsy's ubiquitousness and as evidence of contemporary fears of contagion.[200] The idea is that sheet music is a side product that gives evidence of minstrelsy's infiltration of the market, rather than evidence for women's active involvement in blackface performance. In Lott's estimation, and in many scholars' work since, any

[198] Tawa, 92.
[199] Lott, 59.
[200] Lott, 59.

interaction women had with minstrelsy is considered merely the effect of minstrelsy's prevalence in every sphere of popular culture. As if the private only emulates the public. As if each performance doesn't create meaning, doesn't *do* its own cultural work.

**"Jim Crow" in the Archives**

Already familiar with assumptions of minstrelsy's masculinity, in surveying binder's volumes over the past two years, I was surprised by the amount of minstrelsy I discovered: collected, packaged, and stamped with women's names. In fact, I half assumed that they were there for the performance of husbands and sons, so embedded was the idea of minstrelsy's impropriety for Victorian ladies. And undoubtedly, there were those women who (at least in word if not in action), thought minstrelsy unsuitable for home performance.

But the presence of minstrel tunes both in binder's volumes and in the contemporary writings of women performers and audience members directly contradicts the popular scholarly belief that women were absent from the practice.

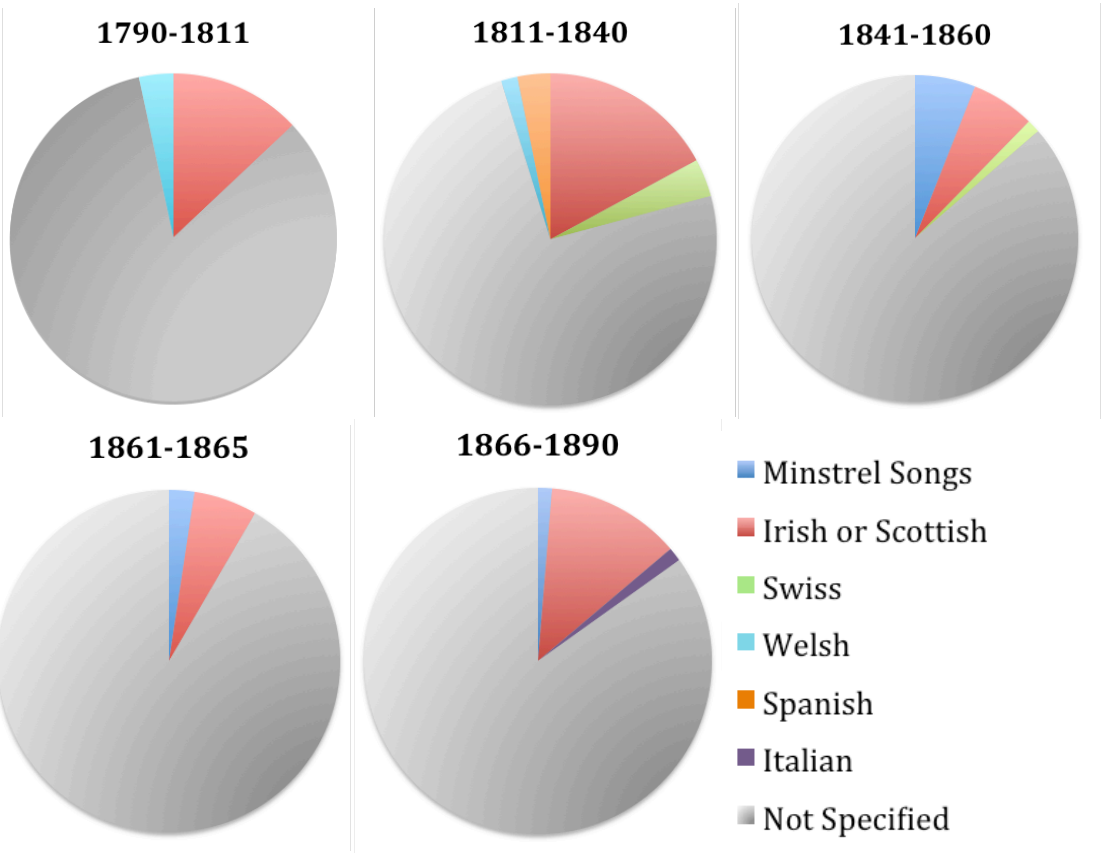
First, to show the general presence of minstrel songs in the volumes, I catalogued the contents of ninety-six binder's volumes spanning the entire century from three archives: The Harvard Theatre Archive, the Library of Congress, and the Johns Hopkins Lester Levy Collection. After making a comprehensive list of all included pieces, I separated out the vocal songs, resulting in a list of 2,084 pieces of vocal music.

I then tallied all mentions of Others (other places, other peoples, and ethnic, racial, or national caricatures), and calculated their relative frequency of occurrence. The

definition of "Other" is tricky, since, as William Williams has shown, in addition to songs caricaturing Native Americans, African Americans, and "Celtic Fringe," there is a substantial presence of German Lieder and songs from Italian and French operas. Understanding, as Williams does, the different associations between ethnic caricatures and songs intended for musical and social uplift, I do not consider the Lieder and Italian and French opera excerpts in my tally, because they were not intended as caricatures of ethnic Others.[201] In this chart and the charts that follow, I only noted the Other groups that account for more than one percent of the total songs.

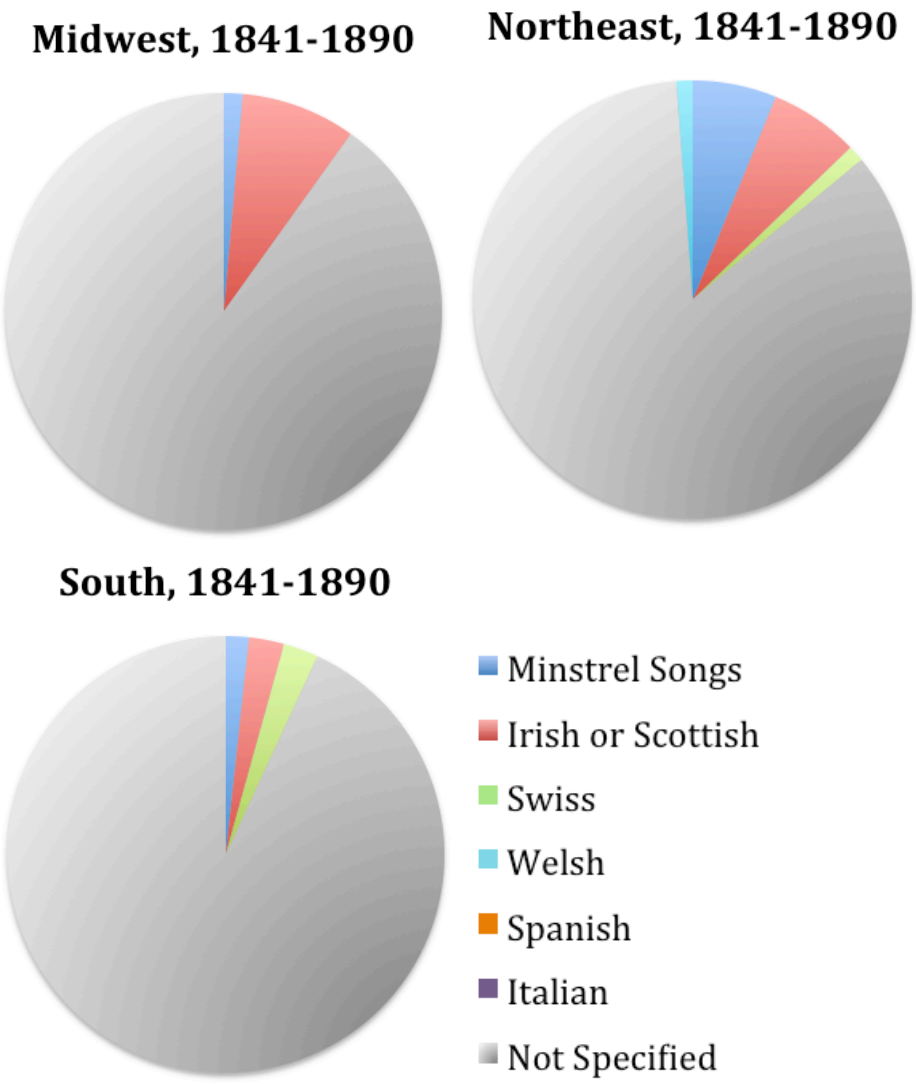
As the first set of charts (figures 2.19-2.23) make clear, women's performance of minstrelsy directly paralleled the popularity of staged blackface minstrelsy: in the period from 1841-1861, when stage minstrelsy was at its height, minstrel song sheet music too reached its peak in binder's volumes—making up 6% of all songs. While this may not seem like a high percentage, what this means that if the average binder's volume contained 50 songs (which would be a fairly lean volume) *three* of them would be blackface; if a woman owned 100 songs, then she would have *six* blackface songs to choose from.

[201] William Williams provides a more thorough deconstruction of the social associations of these various inclusions in his chapter, "Ethnicity and Parlor Songs: Paddy Compared" in William H. A. Williams *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland & the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 78-88.




Figures 2.19-2.23. Charts showing relative prevalence of Others in Binder's Volumes by period.

Focusing on the period from 1841-1890 when minstrel songs appear in the volumes, I next divided the songs by region, finding that the popularity of minstrel shows in the Northeast is also reflected in women's collections: they again account for about 6% (see second set of charts, figures 2.24-2.26).




Figures 2.24-2.26. Charts sowing relative prevalence of Others in Binder's Volumes by region.

Not only did women collect minstrel songs, but contemporary women's writings show that they also attended minstrel show performances and performed minstrelsy at home and school. On May 1, 1847, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to friend and fellow suffragette Elizabeth Smith Miller, signing the letter, "Your Own, Johnson." Stanton explained the nickname in her reminiscences:

> When the Christy Minstrels first appeared, we [Mrs. Miller and I] went one evening to hear them. On returning home we amused our seniors with, as they said, a capital rehearsal. The wit and philosopher of the occasion were called, respectively, Julius and Johnson; so we took their parts and reproduced all the bright, humorous remarks they made… Mrs. Miller has been "Julius" and I "Johnson" ever since.[202]

Gertrude Clanton Thomas from Augusta, Georgia wrote in her diary on April 19, 1852: "Pa, Aunt, Sister, and cousin Emma went to hear the Campbell minstrels. I went with Mr. Thomas. I was not particularly pleased with the performance. Yet I enjoyed my walk home very much."[203] Gertrude married Mr. Thomas eight months later.

On January 19, 1854, after scolding him for his lazy correspondence, Ellen Tucker Emerson[204] told her father, Ralph Waldo Emerson, about her experiences at her new school, "The girls here have concerts which they call 'Christie's Minstrels' [sic] and indeed I think they sound some like them. It is the funniest music I ever heard and quite

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[202] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* (New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 418-419.

[203] Ella "Gertrude" Clanton Thomas (1834-1907) of Augusta, Maine, was born into a prominent planter family. See Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary of Ella Gertrude Thomas, April, 1852, in *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889,* ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 102-103. Bailey uses Gertrude as a case study in her *Music and the Southern Belle*, and references this diary entry on p. 37.

[204] Ellen Tucker Emerson (1839-1909) was a life-long resident of Concord, MA where she cared for her parents, taught Sunday school at the First Parish, wrote a biography of her mother Lidian Emerson, and edited the manuscripts of James Elliot Cabot.

inspiring."[205]

Finally, Blanche Butler Ames (1847-1939),[206] in a letter to her mother Sarah, describes girls at her school not only singing the songs, but blacking up: "They had on all kinds of dresses, and horse hair for wool, their faces were all blacked up and they had guitars and other musical instruments."[207]

Individual pieces within binder's volumes can also offer insight into performance practice. Returning to the Forbes Perkins family of the vignette which opened this chapter, in her first of the three volumes, Edith included the 1869 song "Shew! Fly Don't Bother Me" (figures 2.27 and 2.28). The cover shows a common "Jim Crow" stock character from the minstrel stage, and the lyrics reflect blackface dialect. At the top right corner of the cover, Edith wrote her name and dated it 1870, which, in the Forbes Perkins circle, is typically a record of when and by whom the song was performed. At 27 years old, married to railroad magnate Charles Elliott Perkins with two children, Edith performed as Jim Crow. Edith's daughter, Plummy did the same. In Plummy's scrapbook, she reminisces about her own performance of racial Otherness, writing simply: "I posed as a Spanish dancer, I sang negro songs."[208]

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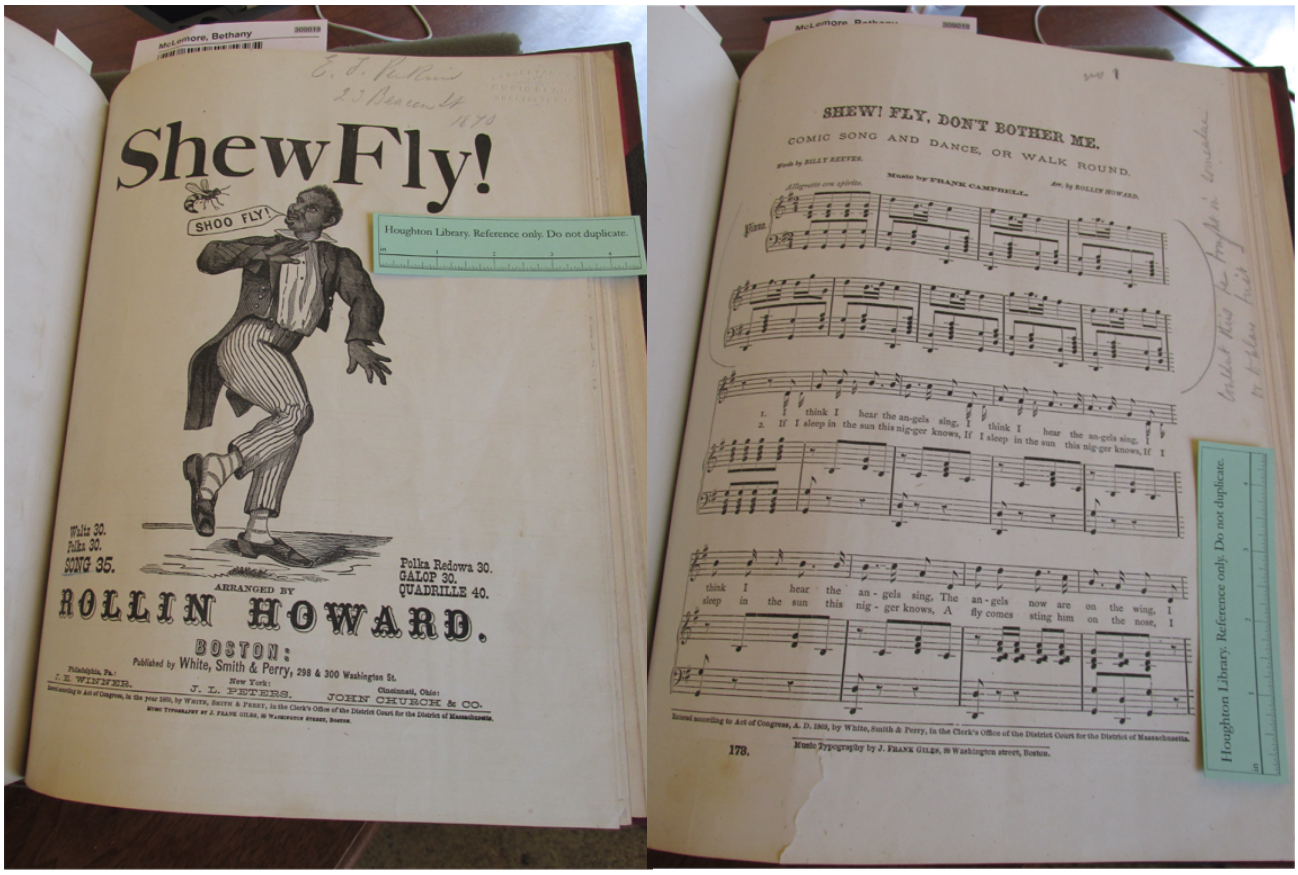
[205] Ellen Tucker Emerson, 1839-1909, Letter from Ellen Tucker Emerson to Ralph Waldo Emerson, January 19, 1854, in *The Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson,* Vol. 1. Gregg, Edith W., ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1982), 53-54.

[206] Blanche Butler Ames (1847-1939), wife of celebrated Civil War general Adelbert Ames, was born in Massachusetts to Sarah and Benjamin Franklin Butler, who also served as a general in the War. This letter was written from the Academy of the Visitation in Washington D.C., which she attended from the age of 13.

[207] Blanche Butler Ames, Letter from Blanche Butler Ames to Sarah Hildreth Butler, February 4, 1861, in *Chronicles from the Nineteenth Century: Family Letters of Blanche Butler and Adelbert Ames Married July 21st, 1870,* Vol. 1 (Clinton, MA: Privately published, 1957), 719.

[208] Vol. 5, Edith Forbes Perkins Cunningham Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.




Figures 2.27 and 2.28. Annotations on Rollin Howard, arr., music by Frank Campbell, words by Billy Reeves, "Shew! Fly, Don't Bother Me: Comic Song and Dance, or Walk Around" (Boston: White, Smith, & Perry, 1869). Contained in Edith Forbes Perkins Bound Collection, Lowerre 278, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

In addition, the annotations on the piano part for Rollin Howard's "Shew! Fly"[209]

[209] Rollin Howard, arr., music by Frank Campbell, words by Billy Reeves, "Shew! Fly, Don't Bother Me: Comic Song and Dance, or Walk Around" (Boston: White, Smith, & Perry, 1869). Contained in Edith Forbes Perkins Bound Collection, Lowerre 278, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Boston.

show that the song was not self-accompanied,[210] allowing Edith freedom to gesture in line with the practices of blackface characters. Edith and Plummy were familiar with blackface performance style. Edith mentions in a 1903 letter to Plummy that she went with Rob and their cousin Annie to a Minstrel Show at Copley Hall. While songs associated with European and Immigrant Others are sentimental in nature and musically non-distinct from other ballads, "Shew! Fly" is a comic parody, distant from music usually associated with white womanhood: the melody is more disjunct, faster, with a playful alberti bass. The difference in musical style serves to distinguish so-called black culture from white musical practice, and thus, in collection and performance, women create blackness and whiteness simultaneously.[211]

The presence of ethnic and racial Others in affluent white households where genteel ladies participated in stereotyped portrayals creates a very different, more complicated picture of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century racial negotiations in private spaces. Edith's servants were often mentioned in letters and journal entries, and even included in family portraits, like in the two reproduced below (figures 2.29 and 2.30); her butler, Peter King, is pictured on the right holding her grandson, Charles Jr. Since home performance of parlor song functioned as a marker of labor-free gentility, the presence and labor of domestic servants—of Honora Falbey and Peter King—signaled and allowed the very performances that associated them with sentimentalized or

[210] Along the right edge of the music is written in pencil: "Couldn't this be brought in somewhere [be] play[ed] first." And noted next to the final staves: "bring this in also if poss[ible]."
[211] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*: *Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 95.

lampooned caricatures. In collecting and performing "Shew! Fly" and other minstrel tunes, women like Edith and Plummy clearly defined the boundaries of their own racial and class identities as distinct from the blackface character. At the same time, they performed a shifting of the burden of labor to the Other, and rationalized the solidifying of the racial binary. They employed black bodies and music to establish the superiority of white people and whiteness.

Figures 2.29 and 2.30. Forbes Perkins family portraits contained in Vol. 10, Edith Forbes Perkins Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Pictured on right: Peter King and Edith's grandson, Charles E. Perkins Jr.

**In Favor of Material and Complete Agency**

In working to shed light on women musicians of the past, to give them agency in the creation of musical performances, musical works, and collections, perhaps scholars can feel hesitant to give agency to women to do seemingly *bad* things. And while that's understandable, it also limits our knowledge of the ways in which stereotypes are formed

and disseminated. As Jacobson argues, "recognizing how [white] privilege is constituted depends our first understanding how whiteness itself has been built and maintained."[212] Expanding the discussion of minstrelsy to include the multitude of performances *not solely* by men in public spaces, we see that women's performances too, are "continual reconstitutions"[213] that change the history of blackface minstrelsy. Women *do* cultural work through collection and performance. By ignoring Victorian women's performances of minstrelsy, we reenact the violence that limited them to the private realm, reiterating the notion that women's activities in private spaces are irrelevant to cultural or political production.

I believe the lack of recognition of women's participation in minstrelsy results from a fundamental misunderstanding of nineteenth-century women's motivations in song collection and performance. When Meyer-Frazier writes that, "Minstrel music would not have been seemly to hand out in pedagogical settings or during courtship rituals nor acceptable for the younger adolescent. As a result of this preference for the proper, the more genteel and sentimental favorites remained highly desirable throughout the century,"[214] she naturalizes ideals of womanhood. She assumes that etiquette was innately and necessarily tied to real women's bodies and actions. She, along with Tawa and Bailey, believe that women's goals in music-making were primarily to perform their womanly duty in line with this etiquette. Writings on Victorian etiquette have thus far

[212] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 1998), 12.
[213] Lott's phrase, see Lott, 95.
[214] Meyer-Frazier, *Bound Songs, Unbound Women*, 6.

outweighed the material evidence of minstrelsy in binder's volumes in scholars' estimation, to the degree that we have gone blind to ways in which discourse and matter contradict one another. As John T. Schlebecker, in his essay "The Use of Objects in Historical Research" writes, historians "seem willing to believe almost anything as long as it is not three-dimensional."[215] We can no longer justify generalizations through appeals to prescribed norms, rather than recognize the obvious material evidence of contradictory individual actions. The prevalence of divergence from prescribed Victorian norms shows that they are *not necessarily* or *always* "subversive" or "deviant" or even "resistant" but constitute their own norms.

**Conclusion: The Legacy of the Binder's Volume**

Unlike Victorian etiquette, and unlike music in performance, a binder's volume is an enduring material artifact. Traces of not only musical performance practice, but also of domestic life more broadly suggest that the volumes were an ever-present agent for women in the home: in between leaves are pressed flowers, scribbled bread recipes, or simple arithmetic problems, and blank pages are elaborated with sketches or poems.

Of course, this assumption that binder's volumes continued to play a role throughout a woman's life again contradicts another rule of Victorian norms: that a woman would stop performing the "duty" of musical performance once she reached adulthood, and instead pass that duty on to her daughter(s). Tawa, Bailey, and Meyer-

[215] John T. Schlebecker, "The Use of Objects in Historical Research," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, edited by Thomas J. Schlereth (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 107.

Frazier argue that the height of musical education and performance generally lasted until about age twenty-two. Bailey writes that the women performed "until such a time as their daughters achieved enough musical ability to take over this responsibility. At that point, it was the duty of the daughter to provide the comforting atmosphere of gentle entertainment in the evenings."[216]

The binder's volumes often show that many women collected most, if not all, of their sheet music during her formative years, and had it bound at their conclusion. But this was certainly not the case for all women. And, the fact that a woman stopped acquiring music once she reached adulthood doesn't mean she stopped performing it. Perhaps, instead, it was common for a woman to continue to play the music she collected during her formative years throughout her life.

There are several clues that debunk the claim that women would stop playing after marriage. I've already mentioned that Edith Forbes Perkins performed "Shew! Fly" at 27 years old, when she was already married with two children. Indeed, as will become increasingly clear, music was integral to Edith's life for its entirety. She was even photographed playing a drumset in her parlor ca. 1915, when she was around 70 years old (figure 2.31).

[216] Bailey, 6.

Figure 2.31. Edith Forbes Perkins at home, playing a drumset, ca. 1915.

But the most obvious and most prevalent evidence for life-long music making is the appearance of a woman's married name, and not her maiden name, on the cover and on individual pieces of music in her volume.[217] Mollie Burroughs Styron, for instance, had two binder's volumes, one of which had her maiden name embossed on the cover ("M.E. Burroughs") and the other her married name ("Mrs. O. M. Styron"). In addition, several pieces from the second volume have her married name, not her maiden name, penciled on the top (for example "Mrs. O.M. Styron from Belle" is written at the top of Henry

[217] This is also pointed out by Meyer-Frazier, *American Women's Roles in Domestic Music Making,* 186, though without noting the implication of life-long music making.

Bishop's "Tho 'tis all but a dream").[218] This evidence proves that Mollie not only bound music after her marriage, but purchased and was gifted music as a married woman. Mollie's interactions with, performance from, and collection of sheet music were life-long practices.

Further, as was the case for the Forbes Perkins family, binder's volumes were often family heirlooms, and thus weighty, enduring material artifacts. After the volume acted throughout a woman's life, it was passed down to continue its influence in the lives of daughters and granddaughters. This lineage is evident in several volumes. In Etta Cooper's volume, written at the top of a blank page is a note dated July 6, 1950, probably written by her grown daughter: "went through this dear book which accompaniments I played oh, so <u>many</u> times for my precious mother to sing when she lived in Mt Carroll & Peoria."[219]

Sometimes a binder's volume contained a record of maternal lineage, thus imbuing the collection with a weight akin to a family bible, but specific to the women of the family. Inside the front cover of the binder's volume of Hattie Bell Tabor (1857-1905) is written her name, "Hattie Bell Tabor," followed by the names of her daughter, Hattie Louise Langill Ames (1882-? (after 1930)), and granddaughter, Mona Lisa Ames Bagby (1902-1944). This loving record and reminder of the women who collected, lived with, and performed from the volume speaks to a sense of maternal connection and

[218] O.M. Styron Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 281, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C.
[219] Etta Cooper, "The Midnight Winds, Untitled Volume," Vol. 547, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

lineage. Perhaps this sense was strengthened by Hattie's premature death at 47 of leukemia. She left her volume to her oldest living daughter, Louise, who in turn passed it to her own daughter, Mona. When Mona died at age 42, she was survived by her husband and three sons, and the binder's volume was donated to the Lester Levy Collection at Johns Hopkins sometime after that. The matriarchal lineage broken, the volume had nowhere else to go.

In addition, fond references to music making in diaries, letters, and scrapbooks show the familial, and especially maternal, associations music bore for children and grandchildren. The scrapbooks maintained by Edith Forbes Perkins and her daughter make continual references to Edith's "old songs" that they both sang throughout their lives, and that Elsie continued to sing after Edith's death in 1925. Sometimes, Elsie recounted singing specific songs, like Charles Glover's "Jeannette & Jeannot"[220] and Thomas Bishop's "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still" (1857).[221] Other times, Elsie or Edith would reach further back along the maternal lineage, reminiscing about when "Nana" (Edith's mother, Rose) would sing Philip Paul Bliss' hymn, "Pull for the shore" to her infant granddaughter.[222]

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[220] Elsie actually wrote "Jeannette and Janet," in Vol. 2, Edith Forbes Perkins Cunningham Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. The song she is referencing is Charles W. Glover, composer and words by Charles Jeffereys, "Jeannette & Jeannot" (Boston: Ditson, n.d.).

[221] Vol. 2, Edith Forbes Perkins Cunningham Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Referencing Thomas Bishop, "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still" (Philadelphia: G. Andre & Co., 1857).

[222] Vol. 3, Edith (Forbes) Perkins Scrapbooks, Perkins-Cunningham Scrapbooks, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Children learned about themselves and their relations to Others at mother's knee, before she eventually abdicated her role and passed down her volume, which then could continue its influence in the lives of her daughters and granddaughters. Her volume provided a material reminder of mother—an idealized image of white Victorian womanhood—and a script to follow in her footsteps. Through her collection and her repeated performances of the music, this script was as much her creation as it was the creation of publishers, lithographers, composers, and lyricists. Binder's volumes played an active, pedagogical role in reinscribing nineteenth-century classed, racial, and gendered performances through continual intra-actions with women's bodies in performance. Examining the role of women in the construction of these identities through collection illuminates a different side to the story of women's domestic performance and the historical construction of whiteness, which in turn allows an understanding of binders' agency and considerable and long-lasting impact.

## Chapter Three: "They heard her singing her last song"[223]: The Corset and Fantasies of Beautiful Death

"She has made of herself an hour glass, whose sands of life pass quickly by."
-Frances Willard, *Woman's Journal*, November 1889

N.B. — We also gather from the above book that the wearing of corsets leads to: —
1. Impeded action of the heart.
2. A weakened spine.
3. Ungracefulness of figure and inelegance of movement.
4. Obesity.
5. Consumption.

-Christopher Rowley
(*The Voice; Or, The Physiologist Versus the Singing Master,* 1898)

### "As long as she is able to breathe": Consumption and the Duties of Womanhood

On September 26, 1893, Julia Chase Merritt lay on her parlor sofa, thin, frail, and flushed. Periodically, she brushed a palm across her abdomen, even though she had already given up any expectation that one morning she'd notice growth there to indicate the life of her unborn third child. With a blanket pulled up to her slim waist, and a stack of paper propped on her bent knees, she drafted a letter in response to a recent message from her sister, Edith Emily Chase:

> My dearest Edith,
>
> Your note and the draft arrived together with Mary's letter and I had a real boo-hoo over them, it is more than good of you to think of me this way, but really I do not need it at all…
>
> I am utterly wretched in every way and it seems sometimes as if I could give myself up to despair but it is for no earthly reason, the Drs. tell me my cough will disappear with the months now, I do not feel badly anywhere nor does there seem to be the slightest thing to worry about but I look as if I had been drawn thro' a knot-hole, tho' everyone tells me I look so much better than when I came back, I do not as yet show in the least, my clothes have not grown tight—I am wearing my corset laced the same as last Fall when you left. But I am just as

[223] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott* (1832).

> cranky as the law allows. I feel a great deal better since I began doing housework and as the house is clean, the children in school no cluttering…
>
> Remember I am cranky and if you do not have another letter for an age you may be sure I am too ugly with myself to have anything to do with anybody else.
>
> -Your devoted, Julia.[224]

Julia, along with many others in her town and even within her immediate circle, suffered the debilitating effects of an illness which often, as in Julia's case, went undiagnosed until its final stages. For most women consumptives like Julia, even after a doctor finally gave the heartbreaking diagnosis of "consumption,"[225] the news had little impact on their personal life or the expectations weighing on them; the roles mandated by womanhood did not allow much leeway for seeking a cure. As Sheila Rothenberg writes, while consumptives from the 1840s on were advised to leave home and seek health in the West, far more men than women did so.[226] Jennie Collier, a woman who recorded the experience of accompanying her brother-in-law in his search for health, noted the gender make-up of the consumptives who went West:

> Since coming here we have met more invalid men than women. It is more probable that men are more disposed to seek a change of climate for health than women. A man is no longer able to attend to business—if he can command the money—he travels. But a woman can manage her household as long as she is able to breathe, and as a rule she prefers an irrepressible kind of suicide to leaving home.[227]

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[224] Julia Chase Merritt to Edith Emily Chase, September 26, 1893, Julia Robillard Morrison Private Collection.

[225] Throughout this chapter, I choose to call the disease by the nineteenth-century name "consumption" rather than twentieth-century term "tuberculosis," following Sheila Rothman, to reflect the nineteenth-century understanding of the disease and its changing cultural associations between the centuries. Sheila M. Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), 2-3.

[226] Rothman, 168.

[227] Charles Denison, *Rocky Mountain Health Resorts: An Analytical Study of High Altitudes in Relation to the Arrest of Chronic Pulmonary Disease* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1880), 117; Samuel A. Fisk, "President's Address," *Transactions of the Colorado State Medical Society* (1889), 19, 20; Raitt and Wayne, *We Three Came West*, 132. Quoted in Rothman, 168.

Julia was able to travel briefly from Helena to South Dakota and then to New York to consult the best doctors to aid in her treatment. But, these relatively brief trips did not alter the expectations attached to her primary role as wife and mother. After struggling with the disease for two years, Merritt became pregnant with her third child. As her pregnancy progressed, she noted her lack of growth, a lack that was easily measured by the tightness of her corset laces. The severity of her illness wasn't known to her family and friends until the last month of her pregnancy, when she returned home to Helena to give birth. Merritt's mother, Cordelia Wood Chase, traveled to Helena to be with her daughter throughout the final weeks of her pregnancy.

The Chase family's letters throughout Julia's illness reveal the family's struggle for peace and their desperate search for a cause and cure. Without any known cause for consumption, this search often ended in the writer's self-blame for Julia's illness, while the writer still held out hope for her recovery. Julia is framed throughout as an angelic and silent sufferer, a common image of idealized consumptive women. For instance, Julia's mother, Cordelia, wrote to her third daughter (Julia's sister), Mary Wood Chase, on January 15, 1894:

> My precious child,
>
> Do not grieve so. It is no more your fault than mine that poor Julia has reached the condition she is now in. I can never cease to reproach myself for having permitted her to sleep with the two children through the long cold winter between the two windows at that little room at Redfield, or to go out… when the weather was so severe. If the …. Tears of regret which mortal can shed will effect a cure, then she will surely be restored to health. And we are now hoping so strongly for her. She has sat up nearly all day to-day, and came down to dinner and supper with us. She cannot yet speak above a whisper, but she suffers <u>very</u> little now, and I am sure the Dr has great hope of her. I really think her improvement has been marvelous since last Thurs. and we will hope that it will continue. I know you would be comforted if you could see her for she is

> cheerful—moves about her room doing little tidy acts—has sewed a little to-day and does not cough much, and not at all hard… My sweet child do not take all the blame to yourself, for we can all see where we would do very differently could we only go back to the start. She has no blame for any one—much less for the sister she loves better than her own life. Then possess your soul in peace and we will hope and pray for a happy ending for all our troubles… I let Julia read your letter and she says—"Dear, dear, I just enjoyed making her happy, and now that I have you, mama, I don't care!" She said you were not in the least to blame. So be comforted, my dear child, and write us more long letters telling just how you are, and about Mr. Wood and Mrs. Lupine. Give my love and best wishes to both…
>
> Always your loving
> Mother
>
> [P.S.]
> Morning- I showed your letter to Julia and so she has written you the enclosed this morning. You had better save it for future reference so that when your heart is bursting you can find comfort in it. Julia is sewing this morning. Be happy, my darling.
>
> Mama[228]

Julia's ability to stay active in her domestic duties gave her mother hope for her recovery. But those hopes quickly soured as Julia's due date neared. Julia gave birth to a daughter, to whom she gave her name ("Julia Helen Merritt") on February 3, 1894. The delivery took what little strength Julia had left and she died three weeks later, on February 28. Julia's father, Alonzo, had come to Helena for her last few days, and so both her parents were by her side, sitting vigil with their wasting daughter. The baby, Little Julia, followed her mother in death on August 21, 1894.

Julia's death rocked the tight-knit family. Cordelia's health rapidly declined. Mary ended her musical studies in Berlin prematurely to return home to be with her. Julia's husband, Stephen, who Mary later described as a "wanderer," had worked as a professor in Helena, but after Julia's death he left the children in order to seek greater

[228] Cordelia Wood Chase to Julia Chase Merritt, January 15, 1894, Julia Robillard Morrison Private Collection.

wealth. Julia and Stephen's two surviving children, Alice and Fields, went to live with Alonzo, Cordelia, and Mary.

Six years later, a tragic accident took Fields' life at the age of twelve. This sudden loss shocked the family, and their friends desperately attempted to comfort them. On August 27, 1900, Elinor C. Walsh wrote to Cordelia, reporting a dream she hoped would give her comfort:

> My dear Friend—
>
> Through a letter received yesterday from a friend of Mr. Merritt at Butte, I've learned of the awful calamity that has occurred in your family. Dear friends, I wish I knew how to express to you all our sense of sorrow in your grief and our heartfelt sympathy. I realize fully how utterly beyond words your sorrow lies, but must write you nevertheless.
>
> I have had such a strange dream, and I will tell it to you as it may have a suggestion of comfort in it. We have been out in the woods this summer, and I thought I was there again, and everything was so silent and peaceful. All at once I became conscious that out of the space in front of me a figure appeared and to my surprise I recognized your daughter, Mrs. Merritt. She was smiling, and her face looked bright and youthful, but she was not looking at me. Her hair was hanging over her shoulders in a way I never saw it, and I noticed how soft and wavy it seemed. I must have turned to see what she was looking at, for I was startled by the words (I know I heard them) "O, Fields, you have come"! in such a glad tone, and in her arms was clasped a small boy in some dark colored clothes,—and I noticed that his hair looked very dark and closely cut. It was so real that I awoke, but, dear friend, I have felt more resigned since, in the feeling that from the mysterious "beyond," if any influence can reach out to snatch from the perils of this life a being whom it fondly watches over, it must be a mother's love. It is terrible to lose little Fields, but do we know what he might have had to go through had he lived? Maybe his mother knew. I hope I have not wearied you—you who have had so much to bear. I wish I could see you and talk to you. When you feel able to write, we would be so glad to hear from you. Mr. Walsh joins me in sympathy for you all. Remember us most kindly to Mr. Chase and Edith.
>
> Very sincerely Yours,
> Elinor C. Walsh (Mrs. F.J. Walsh)[229]

[229] Elinor C. Walsh to Cordelia Wood Chase, August 27, 1900, Julia Robillard Morrison Private Collection.

Elinor attempted to ease the Chase family's grief through recalling Julia's and Fields' goodness in life and imagining their deserved happiness in the afterlife—an impulse which reflects common themes that flourished in nineteenth-century American popular culture. The ways in which the Chase family coped with Julia's dying and death and the subsequent deaths of her children conformed to Victorian rituals of grief which were modeled in fiction, on stage, and in song.

As Jon Finson points out, the oft-noted preoccupation with death in all facets of nineteenth-century U.S. culture was due to nineteenth-century American's constant exposure to illness, death, and dying which made its infiltration of popular culture "a necessity" more than "a macabre obsession":

> The large number of popular songs on dying may not reflect preoccupation so much as familiarity—more first-hand experience. For where the twentieth century has developed a whole set of institutions, medical and mortuarial, to hold the end of life at a technical distance, people had little in the way of professional help during the previous century to insulate them from the events surrounding the passing of their fellow human beings. Death usually occurred in the home, not in a hospital; doctors could do little more for those who were dying than family members; and relatives or friends often took on the tasks surrounding burial, even in urban settings.[230]

I argue that this familiarity came to bear more heavily on women than men, and with the added weight of personal risk. Women were in many ways more intimately tied to songs about death: 1.) they had more frequent interactions with the music through practice and performance, 2.) the largest portion of songs about death deal with the death of children and of young women, 3.) women played a large role in caring for the ill and planning

[230] Jon W. Finson, *The Voices That Are Gone: Themes in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture* (New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), 83-84.

memorials, and 4.) women were perceived as more susceptible to the deadliest disease of the nineteenth century: consumption.

In previous chapters, I investigated the links between women and objects in material and identity formation and performance. Here I will integrate a consideration of nineteenth-century Americans' preoccupation with the material realities of death and illness (particularly consumption), as a ubiquitous fear which infused the meanings of these intra-actions. A disease thought to be both intrinsic and womanly, and diagnosed and monitored solely by its material effects, consumption was understood as an illness harbored in women's (and womanly) bodies. It was thus linked to womanly activities and consumer goods: many believed consumption to be caused or exacerbated by corseting and cured or prevented by song.

Though many scholars in American Studies and Musicology have noted the popular preoccupation with death in the nineteenth century, and particularly the tendency to dwell on the deaths of young women and children, this chapter will expand this investigation to account for the complex intra-actions among song, binder's volumes, corsets, and consumption, all of which cohabitated the parlor, and all of which are of the body—they either impact or are created by the capabilities of the lungs. These intra-actions reveal contradictory impulses to attach meaning and importance to women's lives on the one hand, while idealizing their material wasting and death on the other. The corset provided a private reminder of a consumptive's material loss and a means for her to measure the progression of an illness that would inevitably end in death. The songbook, in turn, simultaneously enabled performances of frailty and death as central

components of gender identity, reflected the daily experience of death (and I will argue, specifically the experience of consumption), and provided the images and means of coping with staggering loss.

**Consumption's Material Effects**

In the nineteenth century, consumption was responsible for a quarter of deaths in the U.S. and Western Europe[231] and affected people across lines of gender, race, class, and age, though women and the young died in slightly higher numbers.[232] In the U.S., Sheila Rothman notes that "although consumption was found in every region, it was considered particularly endemic to New England (which seemingly had the worst social and environmental irritants)."[233]

Unfortunately, before Robert Koch's discovery of the Tuberculosis bacterium in 1882, accurate diagnosis of consumption was spotty at best, especially in its early stages.[234] Consumption was a term that encompassed a number of various wasting diseases. Pulmonary tuberculosis, which the nineteenth century called *phthisis pulmonalis* or consumption of the lungs,[235] was diagnosed according to telltale physiological symptoms that often did not manifest until its late stages. Lawlor summarizes:

> As the disease progresses, the patient becomes emaciated and even skeletal, with the lips drawn back to reveal teeth; eye sockets are hollowed and bones stick out

[231] Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of a Romantic Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2006), 5.
[232] Rothman, 13.
[233] Rothman, 4.
[234] Lawlor, 5.
[235] Lawlor, 5.

> from the flesh. The "hectic fever" worsens, characteristically strongest towards the evening, giving the patient's skin a vivid "hectic flush" which strongly contrasts with the otherwise whitened and drained appearance. Blue veins are often apparent under the seemingly transparent skin. Coughing too increases as the lungs disintegrate: the patient may expectorate blood and other matter, often with a fetid smell. Although the patient remains *compos mentis* until the end, the death can be extremely unpleasant, with patients becoming more and more short of breath, increasingly unable to control their coughing and expectoration, unable to gain a moment's peace.[236]

By 1830, these symptoms were firmly ingrained in popular culture. Rothman writes, "most Americans, and certainly all New Englanders, had a firsthand familiarity with its symptoms… Everyone understood that a hollow cough, an emaciated body, night sweats, and daily intermittent fevers were marks of consumption."[237] But even when these signs were present, as in Julia Chase Merritt's case, doctors were often hesitant to give a formal consumption diagnosis. In her landmark book, *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag notes that a diagnosis was heard as a death knell which doctors believed increased the patient's chance of dying, similar to the perceived impact of a cancer diagnosis a century later.[238]

**Consumption & The Trappings of Womanhood**

Though only slightly more women died of consumption than men, consumption was increasingly associated with womanhood throughout the nineteenth century because, as Lawlor writes, "the culture of sensibility prioritized female delicacy."[239] Contemporary

[236] Lawlor, 5.
[237] Rothman, 14.
[238] Sontag Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1988), 7.
[239] Lawlor, 155.

doctors believed women were inherently weaker, and therefore more susceptible to illness. In addition, the stages of consumption's progression were tied to feminization,[240] providing, Leigh Summers writes, "a metaphoric equivalent for delicacy, sensitivity, sadness, and powerlessness which were all strongly identified as feminine characteristics in the nineteenth century."[241] Ironically, though the consumptive body was a feminine body, the only treatment—leaving home for the sea, or later, for the West—was based on a masculinizing narrative and accessible to very few women.[242]

While consumption diagnoses were unreliable, prevention was impossible because the disease's cause was completely unknown. Doctors believed it was hereditary, and thus believed that the illness stemmed from both a weakness in familial lineage *and* a weakness in gender. But then, consumption would often baffle physicians when it appeared in families completely without precedent.[243] In these cases, doctors often blamed the ill (woman) for the origin of the illness, and so the list of consumption's possible causes included practices specific to womanhood. For example, contemporaries believed women with any disposable income were bound to weaken themselves through their interactions with mass-produced goods.[244] From the late-eighteenth-century women were increasingly defined as "conspicuous consumers of the products of capitalism… and as prone to living the most sedentary of lifestyles."[245] Thomas Beddoes, in a 1799 essay

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[240] As discussed by both Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), 138ff, and by Rothman.
[241] Summers, 138.
[242] This is demonstrated by Rothman in her side-by-side comparison of narratives from men and women consumptives.
[243] Rothman, 14.
[244] Lawlor, 155.
[245] Lawlor, 155.

wrote that women "exist in a perpetual state of dangerous weakness… by whatever cause women under thirty are weakened, there is always considerable hazard of consumption."[246]

Of the supposed gender-specific causes of consumption, corsetry ranked high. This is understandable since, as shown in chapter one, the practice of tight-lacing impacted the organs associated with the most visual of consumptive cases: consumption of the lungs.[247] And in fact, over time, the disuse of the bottom portion of the lungs of a corseted body caused mucous build-up which often led to a persistent cough sometimes diagnosed as, or comorbid with, consumption. The link between corseting and consumption was thus a common sense conclusion for many contemporary doctors. An American physician writing in 1827 believed corsets were a crime akin to suicide, writing that they were "a slow and fashionable poison [that] lay their victims in the grave… loaded with guilt."[248]

But to take the claims of contemporary doctors at face value would mean accepting that corsetry was the cause of not only consumption, but also hysteria, mental defects, ulcers, and cancer. Feminist critiques of corsetry have thoroughly examined these claims, and Valerie Steele's work has demonstrated that "from the perspective of modern medicine, corsets were extremely unlikely to have caused most of the diseases for which they were blamed."[249] Though we now know the disease then known as consumption

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[246] Lawlor, 157.
[247] Lawlor, 5.
[248] *The Homeopathic World*, volume 3 (1868). Quoted in Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 69.
[249] Steele, 68.

could not be self-inflicted through fashion, an *actual* causal link is not important here. Rather, recognizing contemporaries' *perceived* link between women's corseting and consumption enables an understanding of how women and the womanly ideal became more fully entangled with frailty and death. Contemporary belief attributed many consumptives' deaths to corseting. We can therefore analyze women's corseted corporeal and aural bodies as tinged with a perceived danger that is reflected in their song performances.

**The Idealization of Consumption**

As we've seen, consumption in the nineteenth century was diagnosed, understood, and observed on a solely material basis: by catastrophic bodily signs that gradually increased as they eased the patient into death. Perhaps it was precisely because of the gruesome and uncertain realities of the disease that it became a vehicle for idealization and romanticization; an attempt to help ease the widespread suffering it caused. In her senior thesis for the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania (1876), Elizabeth Bigelow wrote, "Consumption is the most flattering of all diseases, as well as the most insidious and fatal."[250] Thinness, a pale complexion, and rosy cheeks increasingly became both the hallmarks of ill health and of beauty. This macabre aesthetic infiltrated art, literature, and as I will show later, women's beauty regimens and parlor song collections.

[250] Elizabeth H. Bigelow, "A Thesis on Pulmonary Consumption" (Senior thesis, Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, 1876), 4-8. Quoted in Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture Since 1870* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 1996), 10.

The idealization of the appearance of consumption can be seen in visual art, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, as discussed by Katherine Ott. She flags works by European and American artists, the latter of whom include Thomas Eakins and Thomas Hovenden, who contributed to the idealization of fragility, delicacy, and death through their depiction of sickly subjects.[251]

Consumption was not only constructed as the ideal way to look, but also as the ideal way to actually die. Clark Lawlor traces Romantic authors' uses of consumption, which at their hands is transformed into an "easy and beautiful death" that "took away the brightest and the best of both sexes: fair maidens expired in full bloom, while poetic young men, those Keats and Shelleys who burned brightly and exhausted their vital energy in heroic early death, became martyrs to literature."[252] This literary beautification of consumption can be seen in Edgar Allan Poe's "Metzengerstein":

> The beautiful Lady Mary! How could she die? – and of consumption! But it is a path I have prayed to follow. I would wish all I love to perish of that gentle disease. How glorious! To depart in the hey-day of the young blood—the heart all passion—the imagination all fire—amid the remembrances of happier days—in the fall of the year—and so be buried up forever in the gorgeous autumnal leaves![253]

But the consumption that inflamed cheeks and symbolized goodness and beauty in literature was only a stand-in for a much darker reality. The consumptive death depicted in Romantic literature and poetry—a calm, peaceful passing for a beautiful young soul—seldom reflected a consumptive's actual experience of a disease which could quickly

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[251] Ott, 13-14.
[252] Lawlor, 2.
[253] Edgar Allan Poe, "Metzengerstein," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. II, Tales and Sketches 1831-42,* ed. Thomas Olive Mabbott (Cambridge, MA: Belknapp Press of Harvard UP, 1978), 20. Quoted in Lawlor, 1.

escalate from a gradual and manageable decline to extreme and unexpected horror. Rothman writes that a consumptive's "death was anything but beautiful;" their bodies wasted away,

> The lungs now sounded hollow…and the cough, known as the 'graveyard cough' or 'death rattle,' was distinctive and unmistakable…The pain in the joints was constant, the pulse accelerated and then became weaker, diarrhea broke out and became uncontrollable, and the legs swelled. All these changes gave a ghostly and cadaverous appearance, indicating that a person had 'gone into consumption.'[254]

Though writers and readers were undoubtedly well aware of the gruesome realities of consumption, they continued to construct the Romantic ideal of death with consumption at its center.[255] Some common images they created not only appeared in literature, but also in song and in actual usage in times of mourning, as we saw in Julia Chase Merritt's case, and will see reflected in further case studies discussed later in this chapter. I've identified four recurring themes (some of which we've already encountered) in women's songs which infiltrate letters and diary entries. Given Lawlor's study of similar themes in literature, these tropes in song texts would have been easily identified by Victorians as signs of consumption:

1. A gentle, angelic, and silent sufferer dying gradually.
2. Young life taken too soon but perhaps for the better.
3. The victim being "too good" or "too beautiful" to live.
4. The hope of reuniting with the deceased in heaven.

**Lacing to the Consumptive Ideal**

The corset was one of the primary means by which women achieved a consumptive

[254] Rothman, 17.
[255] Lawlor notes that Poe's wife and mother both died of TB, Lawlor, 3.

appearance. So, despite their awareness of corseting's reported link to consumption and death, Victorian women continued to tight-lace. In fact, Summers notes that the warnings about corsetry did "little or nothing to reduce corsetry's popularity," but "may have actually served to increase the practice of tight lacing."[256] Like fainting, Summers writes, consumption was considered a womanly affliction, which "perpetuated and reified cultural expectations of the feminine."[257] For Victorian women, weakening one's body was not a wholly bad thing, since weakness was an essential component of ideal womanhood.

Corseting was linked to consumption as an apparent cause. And through corseting, women not only replicated the idealized consumptive look, but also, as Summers notes, they mimicked sexual arousal:

> Tightly laced corsetry was in fact integral in the emulation of consumption's lesser and more appealing symptoms…The tubercular woman's face was often pallid, but notable for its pronounced flush. Her body was restless and her breasts rose and fell rapidly as her lungs struggled to inhale sufficient oxygen. Periods of hyper-activity in the course of the disease alternated with periods of languidness, paralleling both a model of heterosexual sexual intercourse and the effect of the corset on the female body that made it appear sexually aroused. Her symptoms bore a keen resemblance to those of the tightly corseted but otherwise healthy middle-class woman, who fainted with such abandon at the ballroom.[258]

Women sought to embody consumption's primary physiological symptom—wasting away—through tightly lacing themselves every day. In doing so, they also replicated the sexualized supposed effects of the disease; Ott writes that consumption was often linked

[256] Summers, 138. Here citing Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," *Signs* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 562.
[257] Summers, 138.
[258] Summers, 140.

to "euphoria, optimism, an overactive sex drive, and creative genius."[259] Further, by replicating the materiality of consumption, contemporaries believed that women were increasing their chances of actually developing its symptoms; women therefore balanced achieving the material and sexualized ideal with significant risk.[260]

But through corseting, a woman controlled the cause of these symptoms. She didn't control the creation and power of the ideal, but she controlled the extent to which she conformed to it. While consumption was believed to stem from genes and womanhood itself, and therefore was completely beyond her control, she held her laces in her own hands, determining for herself the extent of her material conformity.

And it's important to note again, that even though the corset did not cause consumption, corseting was a violent act, the effects of which mimicked the outward signs of consumption: flushed, rapid breath, and a thin waist. Further, contemporary physicians were not completely wrong in their understanding of the health risks related to corsetry. Their more justifiable concerns centered around respiratory restriction (as we've seen), infertility, malnutrition, and deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth from physically weakened bodies.

**The Living & The Dying Room: Parlor as Nexus of Life & Afterlife**

The woman embodying ideal feminine frailty, capacity for death, and beauty

[259] Ott, 74.
[260] Carolyn Day studies the links between fashion and consumption in her dissertation, "Drop dead gorgeous: The feminization and idealization of tuberculosis in England, 1780-1850" PhD diss., Tulane University, 2010.

fittingly held sway within a room that served both for entertaining guests and for memorializing the dead. For many nineteenth-century middle- to upper-class women in the U.S., the parlor provided a space to create, manage, and perform their identities. But the parlor also provided a space for women to care for and remember ill and passed loved ones, to maintain their routine even during their own illness, and, ideally, to die.

In her study of historical home designs, Allison Burkette shows that by mid-century, home plans often included distinct "parlors" and "living rooms."[261] The parlor, located at the front of the house,[262] was a formal room open to the public, while the living room served as a gathering place for the family's private and casual use. The parlor acted as a nexus of public and private: a space customized to a family, used by the family on a daily basis, but open to guests.

The parlor served as a guest's introduction to the family's identity.[263] Burkette writes that the parlor would at times be referred to as a "memory room," since the room often functioned much like "a family museum, a place to display the physical manifestations of a family's history—pictures, souvenirs, artwork, and other collections that symbolize accumulated family knowledge."[264] Women were the curators of this family museum; contemporary writings tell of how women "'cultivated' or 'tended' these

[261] Allison Burkette, "Parlor Talk: Complexity from a Historical Perspective," *American Speech* 87, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 399.
[262] Sally McMurry, "City Parlor, Country Sitting Room: Rural Vernacular Design and the American Parlor, 1840-1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1985), 263.
[263] A symbol of formality and luxury, the very ability of a family to maintain a parlor relied on their economic status, and also on their geographic location and lifestyle, which has been thoroughly investigated by McMurry.
[264] Burkette, 399.

rooms as if they were gardens."[265] They filled the rooms with all the best, most expensive objects the family owned:

> books, fancywork, pictures, musical instruments, small sculptures, and other 'objects of taste' were arranged casually around the room's focus, the center table. Later, decorators recommended smaller, dispersed tables. Books, now more available and more widely read than ever before, included such items as 'gift books' (popular illustrated volumes, usually with a religious message), the Bible, and works of fiction.[266]

And, I would add, a collection of songs. The cultivation of the items in a parlor replicates on a larger scale women's identity creation and management through the binder's volume discussed in chapter two.

The memories collected in the parlor often paid tribute to friends and family members that had passed on: the prevalence of specially designed trinkets for locks of hair and post-mortem portraiture[267] are only two of several ways in which Victorians clung to the material bodies of those who had passed to immateriality. Though many Victorian objects of remembrance are unthinkably morbid to most modern U.S. sensibilities, it's important to remember that every nineteenth-century parlor was not only a place for memorial, but intermittently became a *literal* room for the dying and the dead (in contrast to the "living" room).

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[265] Burkette, 399. Cites Candace M. Volz, "A Modern Look at the Early Twentieth-Century House: A Mirror of Changing Lifestyles," in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services,* ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 25-48.
[266] McMurry, 263.
[267] Sarah Iepson, "From Fetish to Forsaken: Materiality, Culture, and the Posthumous Photograph" (presentation, Nineteenth Century Studies Association, 36th Annual Conference, Boston, MA, March 27, 2015).

As the ideal nineteenth-century woman wasted away with ease and beauty, she would do so not out West and not in a sanatorium or hospital, but at home.[268] After the death of a family member, their body was laid out in the parlor for viewing services. In the Victorian home, then, death was ever-present and represented not only a passing from the earth, but also a passing, as Ott puts it, from one domestic ideal to "a domestic heaven where the family would reunite."[269] The parlor thus served as a medium not only between the private family home and the public world, but also between the life and afterlife, the home and the heavenly home. It was both transition and memorial. And it was here that women held sway, where they entertained new acquaintances, where they met suitors and good friends, and where they practiced and performed music; it is where they lived and died.

Both women and the parlor were key in the management of dying and the rituals of death and memorial. This link provides context for the centrality of frailty, death, and dying to ideal femininity; one's womanhood was dependent not only on her management of these rituals, but also on her own capacity for death. In part because of this idealization of women's frailty, especially with their susceptibility to the scourge of consumption, and in part because the parlor was the place where women performed rituals of death *and* music, the songs they sang frequently tell stories about death and mourning. I'll next examine the role of these song performances in constructing ideal frailty and in furthering women's entanglement with, and enabling the fantasy of, beautiful death.

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[268] Ott, 14.
[269] Ott, 14.

**Prevalence of Death in Songs, Binder's Volumes**

Nicholas Tawa and Jon Finson have outlined the major themes in parlor song throughout the nineteenth century, themes which Carl Wilson describes as "schmaltz": full of "scorned maidens, sainted mothers, heroic soldiers and dead wives and babies."[270] Parlor song primarily focused on love or affection, time, mortality, estrangement, piety, or pastoral scenes.[271] Because of the role of parlor songs in Victorian courtship rituals, it's understandable that composers often picked subjects that dealt with chaste love. After 1810, however, the love described in the texts of parlor ballads turned increasingly morbid. Tawa notes that "after 1810 people may smile now and then in their songs; but they also suffer more. The mention of Cupid grows scarce. Love turns serious. Its sadder aspects dominate."[272] In chapter two, I showed the prevalence of sheet music about racial and ethnic others in the binder's volumes. Here, I will focus on another common subject occurring in the volumes and its associated musical topics: death and mourning.

To show the prevalence of death as a textual topic in binder's volumes, I used the contents of the same ninety-six binder's volumes spanning the entire century used in chapter two from The Harvard Theatre Archive, the Library of Congress, and the Johns Hopkins Lester Levy Collection. Out of the 2,084 pieces of vocal music in those ninety-six volumes, I noted all pieces that obviously referenced death in their texts. I tallied the relative frequency of the topic according to Tawa's periodization (shown in table 3.1).

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[270] Carl Wilson, Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste (New York; London: Continuum, 2007), 54.
[271] Nicholas E. Tawa, Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860 (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 123.
[272] Tawa, 24.

While during periods one and two (1790-1840), songs about death make up only 11.2% and 10.7% of all songs in the volumes, their prevalence doubles in period 3 (1841-1860), rises again dramatically to 29.3% during the war years, and higher still to 31.3% during the period 1866-1890.

Table 3.1. Percentages of Songs about Death and Dying in Binder's Volumes by Time Period

| Time Period | Percentage of Songs about Death |
|---|---|
| Period 1 (1790-1811) | 11.2 |
| Period 2 (1811-1840) | 10.7 |
| Period 3 (1841-1860) | 20.5 |
| Period 4 (1861-1865) | 29.3 |
| Period 5 (1866-1890) | 31.3 |

I next tallied the songs about death by geographical region during periods three, four, and five (1841-1890) when the songs show the highest predominance nation-wide. Consumption was a regionally-associated disease; it was considered more endemic to New England and consumptives (but mostly men) were advised to move West for a cure. I hypothesized that the results would show a higher rate of songs about death in binder's volumes from the Northeast. And, as shown in table 3.2, during this period, the Northeast did in fact show the highest percentage of songs about death with 26.7%, followed by the South with 21.4%, and the West with 19.9%. This suggests that many of the songs about death and mourning, though never mentioning consumption directly, are by and large about the experience of consumption.

Table 3.2. Percentages of Songs about Death and Dying in Binder's Volumes by Region (1841-1890)

| Region | Percentage of Songs about Death |
|---|---|
| West | 19.9 |
| South | 21.4 |
| Northeast | 26.7 |

**Consuming Consumption: Collecting Songs about Death**

Susan Sontag notes the hesitation of the mother character in Stendhal's *Armance* (1827) to even say the word "consumption" out of fear of speaking it into being.[273] Through this character, Stendhal was voicing a common hesitation of Romantic authors to name the illness. Lawlor notes that because the physiological symptoms of consumption were so recognizable, authors deployed them to describe characters suffering from the disease, often in lieu of actually naming it.[274]

I argue that this is true of parlor song as well. While, as Finson discusses, men's deaths in parlor songs revolve around the death of soldiers, especially during the Civil War,[275] the largest percentage of death songs revolve around the deaths of the beautiful and innocent: young women and children.[276] Women depicted in these songs' lyrics are in a near constant state of suffering or already dead, in which case the female character is often being buried under a willow or yew-tree, or the performer is imagining being buried under a willow. Deaths of young women, Finson finds, are structured along a standard

[273] Sontag, 6-7.
[274] Lawlor, 63, 101.
[275] Finson, 93.
[276] See Finson, 84-93.

narrative in which a woman dies gradually, in stages. He uses H.S. Thompson's 1857 song "Annie Lisle" as an example. He writes:

> The first verse intimates Annie's beauty and provides a probable cause for her death by describing her innocence…
>
> In the second verse Thompson relates the beginnings of Annie's final trial as she lies 'on a bed of pain and anguish,' while he concentrates in the third verse on her delirious perception of 'forms clad in heavenly beauty, waiting for the longing spirit.' In the fourth verse she speaks her last words…
>
> Thompson's story is extensive and relatively complete: Annie lives a blessed life, she begins to fail, she beholds a vision of angels, and she dies at home. The chorus then provides the conclusion: 'Wave willows, murmur waters, Golden sunbeams smile; Earthly music cannot waken Lovely Annie Lisle."[277]

Many features of "Annie Lisle" now seem familiar: her youth, beauty, innocence, gradual and easy passing, and hope for the afterlife are all standard features of the Romantic consumption narrative. Though "Annie Lisle" and other songs about women's deaths never explicitly mention consumption, the narrative that Finson identifies in parlor songs is not coincidental: Annie Lisle's death would have been instantly recognized as death by consumption. Victorian women collected and performed large quantities of songs in which women's deaths are described in ways leaving little question as to their cause; the characters' angelic weakness, delicate fading, and rosy cheeks all allow for an assumed diagnosis of the deadliest disease[278] of the century.

In the 1830s songbook of Amelia Nance held at the Library of Congress, she included James G. Drake's "Pensez a Moi, Ma Chere Amie":

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[277] Finson, 89-90. Finson references a facsimile of the sheet music in a British edition attributed to "W.H. Thompson" reproduced in Nicholas Tawa, ed. *American Solo Songs Through 1865*. In *Three Centuries of American Sacred and Secular Music,* Vol. 1, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sam Dennison (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989), 353-358.
[278] Rothman, 13.

When sorrow clouds thy dream of mirth,
And promised joys fade too soon,
When flowers lie scentless on the earth,
Nor hope is left to gild the loom;
Then while sad thy heart may be,
*Pensez a moi, ma chere amie!*

When music sheds its sweetest lay
When dying winds are heard at night,
And fancy with some magic ray
Shall soothe the breast with visions bright;
Then while thy heart is calm and free,
*Pensez a moi, ma chere amie!*

Fate may sunder ties the nearest,
As now it tears this form from thine.
Hearts whose love is purest, dearest,
Feel the blight that's withering mine;
Yet still with life 'twill cling to thee,
*Pensez a moi, ma chere amie!*

But now adieu—one pearly tear
Is stealing down thy fever'd cheek,
To kindred souls how sweet, how dear,
Expressing more than tongue can speak!
Pure as that tear my faith shall be,
*Pensez a moi, ma chere amie!* [279]

The song's lyrics are ambiguous enough to give meaning to a variety of partings and deaths. But for many, the appeal to the tear "stealing down thy fever'd cheek" undoubtedly recalled loved ones lost to consumption. This was certainly the case in the short story "Who is the Lady?" which ran as a series in the *Universalist Union*, volume 7, in 1847.[280] In it, two nineteen-year-old friends, Alice and Fanny, are both interested in the

[279]Amelia Nance Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 1, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Containing James G. Drake, "Pensez à Moi" (Baltimore: Geo. Willig Jr., n.d.).
[280] "Who is the Lady?" *Universalist Union* 12, no. 22 (April 10, 1847): 348-351; and vol. 12, no. 23 (April 17, 1847): 363-366.

same man: Mr. August Horton. James is interested in Alice, a girl that, though a spoiled city girl, is remade into a sweet, rural ideal when visiting her country friend Fanny. Mr. Horton is the forlorn hero with a heart of gold:

> Mr. Augustus Horton was about twenty-five, with very handsome, intellectual features, and a very pleasing, gentlemanly address, yet a tinge of sadness lingered ever about his dark eyes…surrounded as he was by every luxury wealth could bestow, no fond mother's voice could bless him, no sister commune with the deep feelings that lay hidden in his warm and noble heart. These blessings *had* been his, and memory often recalled them—often, too often for his own peace of mind.
>
> Soon after the death of his mother and sister, his father having died when he was quite young, he left his native land, thinking that a sojourn in foreign countries would mitigate the excess of his grief. Time, the great physician of the mind, did alleviate his anguish, but left a softened melancholy in its stead.[281]

In the conclusion of the story, Fanny plays "Pensez a moi, ma chere amie," Mr. Horton remembers his lost mother and sister, and Fanny wins Mr. Horton.

> As [Alice] entered the parlor, she saw Fanny seated at the piano, surrounded by Mr. Horton, her brothers, and little Emily, who was seated on Mr. Horton's knee. She was playing at Mr. Horton's request, the touching little melody, "Pensez a moi, ma chere amie," and when she came to the lines
>
> "But now adieu—one pearly tear
> Is stealing down thy fever'd cheek,
> To kindred souls, how sweet, how dear,
> Expressing more than tongue can speak,"
>
> Mr. Horton's eyes were overflowing with tears, for reminiscences of the past, and the music of a sister's voice, now hushed, came over his spirit.[282]

In the end, then, Mr. Horton's affections were won by the simple, demure Fanny and her appeal to death, and specifically, to his grief at the loss of his sister through song.

[281] "Who is the Lady?," 350.
[282] "Who is the Lady?" 364.

Though his mother's and sister's illnesses (again) are never named, using this particular stanza of the song for the catalyst of Mr. Horton's emotion informs the reader that his sister, and probably his mother too, died of consumption.

Amelia La Rue Dewees (1849-1915) collected thirty-two songs in her binder's volume, thirteen of which are about death.[283] This unusually high percentage of death songs (40%) reflected Amelia's life experience. When she was only ten months old, her seven-year-old sister, Lucretia, passed away. Though she can't have remembered Lucretia or her passing, the child's death cast a pall over her childhood. The songs in her volume provided ways of imagining a sister she never knew, and helped her and her family cope with her death.

One of Amelia's thirteen death songs was a copy of "Lora Vale," composed by P.P. Bliss and arranged by George Root (Chicago: Root & Cady, 1864):

> Verse 1:
> Calmly fell the silver moonlight
> Over hill and over dale,
> As with mournful hearts we lingered
> By the couch of Lora Vale.
>
> She was dying, gentle Lora,
> She was passing like a sigh
> From a world of love and beauty,
> To a brighter world on high.
>
> Chorus:
> Lora, Lora still we love thee,
> Tho' we see thy form no more,
> And we know thou'lt come to meet us,
> When we reach the mystic shore.

[283] Amelia La Rue Dewees Binder's Volume, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

Verse 2:
Brightly dawned the morrow's morning
Over hill and over dale,
Still with mournful hearts we lingered
By the side of Lora Vale.
She was almost at the river,
When the light broke from the sky,
And she smiled and whispered faintly,
"I am not afraid to die."

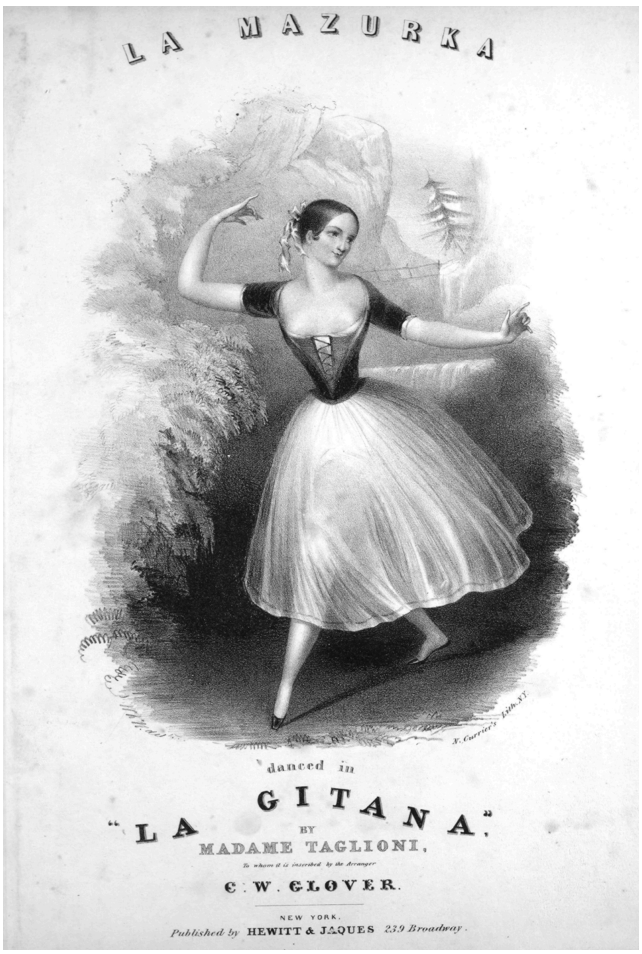
Verse 3:
Softly through the trellised window
Came the west wind's gentle breath,
But she heeded not its mildness,
For she slept the sleep of death,
And beyond the silver moonbeams,
Aye, beyond the stars of night,
Now she dwells, our darling Lora,
In the home of angels bright.[284]

Once again, though the cause of her death is never mentioned, it is clear that Lora Vale is wasting away from consumption. The lingering on the couch, her angelic sweetness, her embrace of her own death, and the potential cure of the "west wind," are all familiar tropes for the consumptive's long decline and death.

The idealized consumptive look was not only present in the lyrics of the volumes, but on their covers as well. As noted in chapter one, the cover artwork often featured women adhering to the corseted silhouette, which now we can understand as also alluding to the consumptive ideal and to the depicted woman's death potential. But because the women on the covers are often black and white sketches, the cover girls could not fully capture the feverish glow of the consumptive. Elvira Sheridan Badger[285] fixed that. On

[284]P.P. Bliss, arranged by George Root, "Lora Vale" (Chicago: Root & Cady, 1864).
[285] Elvira Sheridan Badger is also discussed in chapter two, and again later in this chapter.

the cover of her copy of Charles Glover's arrangement of "La Mazurka" from "La Gitana" which features a sketch of the Swedish ballet dancer Marie Taglioni,[286] Elvira colored in the pale face of the cover woman, giving her the fevered flush of the consumptive (see figures 3.1-3.2).





Figures 3.1 and 3.2. Figure 3.1 (left) is a clean copy of C.W. Glover's "La Mazurka" as danced by Madame Taglioni in "La Gitana." Box 56, Item 46, Lester Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Figure 3.2 (right) is the copy contained in the binder's volume of Elvira Sheridan Badger at the Newberry Library in Chicago, showing the colored-in bow, cheeks, and lips.

[286] Elvira Sheridan Badger Bound Volume 2, Elvira Badger Papers, Box 2, Folder 9. Containing C.W. Glover, arr. "La Mazurka" danced in "La Gitana" by Madame Taglioni (NY: Hewitt & Jacques, n.d.).

**Death and Sentimentality as Musical Topic**

The musical settings for songs about death often reflect the vogue for musical sentimentality that dominated nineteenth-century popular song generally. The publication of Thomas Moore's eight-volume Irish Melodies between 1808 and 1834[287] triggered a vogue for Irish and Scottish tunes and composers borrowed or mimicked melodies to meet the demand. Wilson writes that the publication "introduced nostalgia as a central nineteenth-century musical and literary theme," and associates this nostalgia with American immigrants who were, at this time, still rootless.[288] Composers' use of Irish and Scottish musical stereotypes for sentimental parlor songs over time created a topical connection which was ideally suited for home performance: ideal for the amateur corseted women singers to whom they were marketed, whose particular singing styles and capacities are discussed in chapter one. The topic was characterized by simplicity and ease, featuring short phrases, diatonic melodies, a narrow (usually an octave) range, and dotted rhythms.

This simplicity not only enabled widespread amateur performance but also served to reify notions of ideal womanhood. The simple musical style was viewed most appropriate for women's performance because it was essential that a woman be able to perform without virtuosic display, or else risk her modesty and reputation. This feature of music for home performance has been discussed by Karl Hagstrom Miller, who writes that "musical enjoyment... was founded on the invisibility of the performer, which itself

[287] Wilson, 54.
[288] Wilson, 55.

was based on hiding any sign of expertise or inability, namely any evidence of practice or lack thereof."[289] Though they tried their best to avoid any outright mistakes, women were expected to never display complete competency. A woman's mediocrity was one component of the ideal feminine frailty so essential to Victorian womanhood. In performing songs about death, then, a woman performed frailty through the simple, sentimental musical topic, the textual narrative, and through her corseted material presence and vocal sound.

For example, in her binder's volume, Mary Frances Holden included Stephen Foster's "Eulalie" (figures 3.3-3.4):

> Bluebirds linger here awhile,
> O'er this sacred grassy pile,
> Sing your sweetest songs to me,
> 'tis the grave of Eulalie.
> Roses white, around her tomb,
> Gently wave and sweetly bloom,
> Let your silent language be:
> We will bloom for Eulalie.
>
> Streamlet chanting at her feet,
> Mournful music, sad and sweet,
> Wake her not, she dreams of me
> 'Neath the yew tree, Eulalie.
> Eulalie, but yesternight,
> Came a spirit veiled in white;
> I knew it could be none but thee,
> Bride of Death, lost Eulalie.
>
> Angels, guard her with your wings,
> Shield her from unholy things,
> Bid her dream love-dreams of me,
> Till I come, sleep, Eulalie.
> Bluebirds, linger here awhile,

[289] Karl Hagstrom Miller, "Working Musicians: Exploring the Rhetorical Ties between Musical Labour and Leisure," Leisure Studies 27, no. 4 (October 2008): 430.

O'er this sacred grassy pile,
Sing your sweetest songs to me,
'Tis the grave of Eulalie.[290]

In "Eulalie," a lover keeps vigil over the grave of his lost Eulalie, who, though her grave is old enough to have become grassy once again, appeared in a dream to the narrator. He dreams of when they will meet again in heaven. The images in "Eulalie" directly mirror the consumptive literary trope, as well as Elinor Walsh's vision of Julia Merritt that she recounted in her letter to Cordelia Wood, which was quoted in this chapter's opening. Unlike the songs quoted above that more clearly allude to the material impacts of consumption, the cause of Eulalie's death is less clear. The state of her material body never enters into the story, but only exists as part of his fantasy.

"Eulalie" is typical of parlor song in its textual topic and in its musical features. It is a strophic song written for voice and piano in a major key. It has an easy, singable melody that often outlines the notes of the triad, and it is meant to be performed at a fairly slow tempo. The melody is set in a narrow range and makes use of dotted rhythms mimicking the sentimentality of popular Irish ballads. The piano part is extremely simple, especially when the vocalist is singing, enabling self-accompanied performance. Each stanza is in ABA form, but the whole piece is unified through a consistent rhythmic pattern. The phrases are short—the singer only has to perform two bars before she is allowed a breath.

In singing "Eulalie," Mary Frances Holden performed her frailty through her

[290] Mary Frances Holden Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 280, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C. Stephen Foster, "Eulalie" (New York: Firth, Pond, & Co., 1851).

utterance of the text and through an unambitious performance of an easy song. She sang in her parlor where she had built a monument to death in material objects, and added to that memorial through song. In addition, she performed frailty through the appearance of, and timbre resulting from (as discussed in chapter one), her bound body. Given the well-known dangers of corsetry, she stood in the place of Eulalie, and provided a material anchor and voice for the deceased character. In addition, Mary's virtue was created and sustained through both corsetry and parlor song, both of which encouraged the listener to contemplate her death. Through her performance, Mary, corseting despite the risk, also faced her own very real sense of mortality. Thus death and feminine virtue were connected. Frailty and susceptibility to illness were *prerequisites* for virtue.

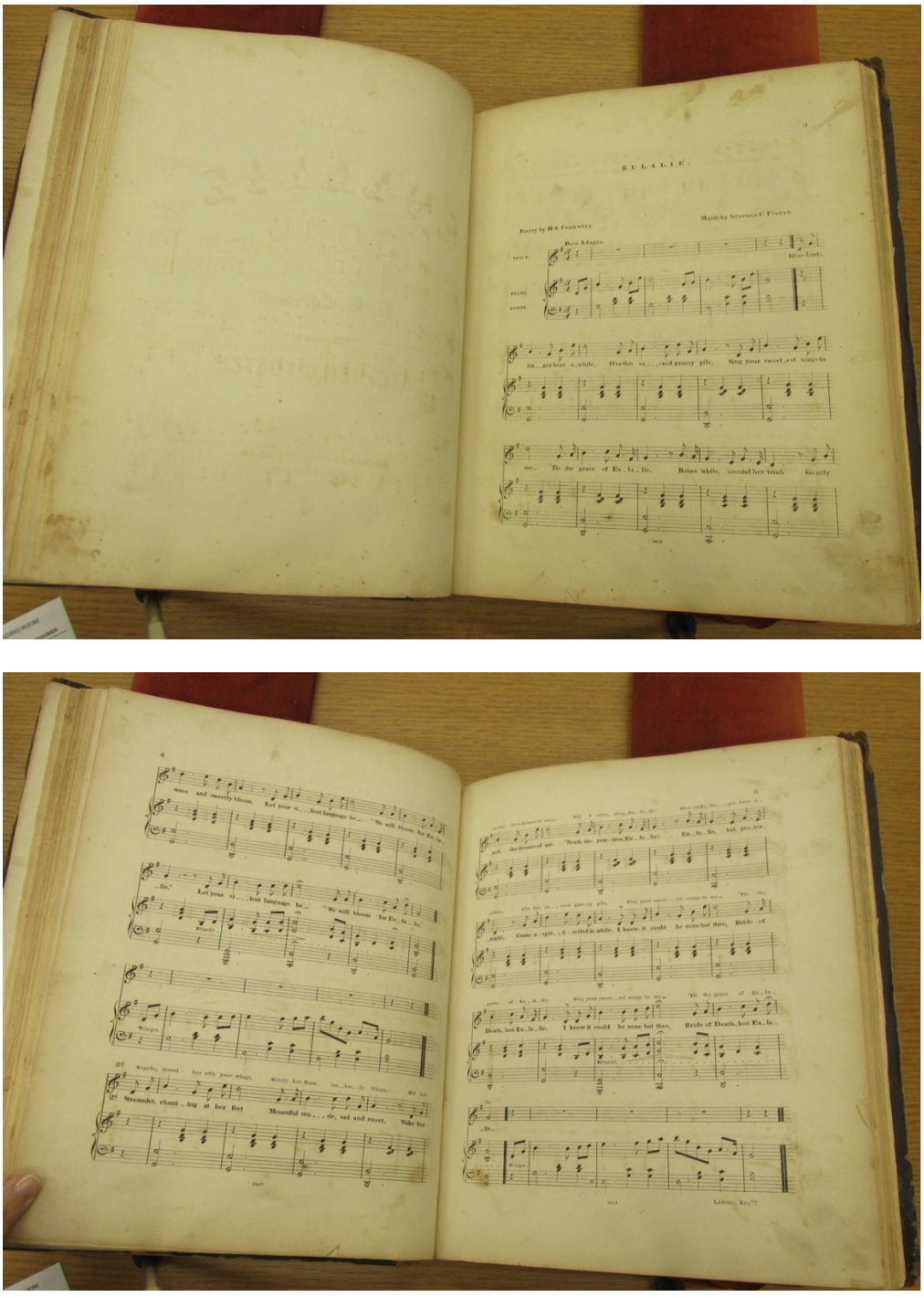



Figure 3.3-3.4. Stephen Foster, "Eulalie" (New York, 1851). In Mary Frances Holden Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 280, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington D.C.

**Song as Cure**

At the same time contemporary physicians decried corseting as a direct cause, or at least a contribution, to consumption, they also frequently prescribed deep breathing and singing as a deterrent or even a cure. In her study of musical articles in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Koza writes that "advocates of music instruction pointed to purported extrinsic benefits of music, including good physical health. Readers were told that singing would guard against consumption, could improve weak lungs, and would cure indigestion."[291]

For instance, Dr. G.W. Hambleton wrote,

> There can be no doubt: whatever as to the great benefit of the habit of deep breathing — full inspiration, deep expiration, full inspiration in ordinary life. Children ought to be regularly trained; under present circumstances, at ten years of age, they have lost nearly nine inches of chest girth. I should like to see true physical development a necessary part of the education of children, and I have always advised singing when the lungs have been developed to a certain degree. The great curse of this country is consumption, and children suffer heavily through it. To develop the lungs thoroughly and maintain that development is the only means of preventing that disease.[292]

Proper breath, then, was the means not only to attain the desired vocal sound, as we saw in chapter one, but could also mean prolonging a person's life. Dr. Hugh Campbell wrote:

> Inspiration is effected by elevation of ribs and descent of diaphragm. One or other of these movements may be made to preponderate, so that if chiefly by ribs it is termed 'thoracic,' or chiefly by descent of midriff, it is 'abdominal.' In women it is chiefly thoracic, in men abdominal, while in infants it is almost wholly of the latter type, owing to the chest being round and its girth therefore not being capable of increase. The abdominal method possesses distinct advantages over every other

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[291] Julia Eklund Koza, "Music Instruction in the Nineteenth Century: Views from 'Godey's Lady's Book,' 1830-77," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 38, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 245-257.
250. Quoting Jno. Stainback Wilson, M.D., "Health Department," *Godey's Lady's Book* 59, no. 1 (July 1859): 84.
[292] Quoted in Christopher E. Rowley, *The Voice; Or, The Physiologist Versus the Singing Master: With Remarks and Extracts from Various Medical and Musical Authorities* (London: Office of Music, 1898), 20.

> mode, (1) More breath can be taken; (2) less effort is required; (3) the important structures passing through the upper opening of the thorax and escape being pressed upon, and thus the liability to congestion of the larynx (‘clergyman's sore throat’) is lessened. . . . Finally, midriff breathing allows of greater control over expiration. . . . Diaphragmatic breathing minimises [sic] the tendency to laryngeal troubles. The following are the good results arising from complete control of the respiratory muscles: —(1) Increases girth of chest and lung capacity, hence the benefit to consumptives; (2) it is of benefit in cases of heart disease; (3) the functions of the abdominal viscera are influenced for good, particularly the liver; (4) I have often observed marked improvement in health result from the proper use of the vocal organs.[293]

Perhaps in singing songs about death then, women not only appealed to the ideal of feminine frailty and their own flirtation with death through corseting, but perhaps also proved that they were not, in fact, *actually* consumptive. In breathing, in producing sound, in not stopping to cough, they were demonstrating their relative health and fitness for entry into matrimony.

**Case Studies**

The following case studies center around women for whom I’ve obtained both musical collections and enough biographical data to understand their experiences of illness and death. By weaving the songs that they collected and performed into a narrative of their actual experiences, I aim to better understand the meaning and function of these songs in women’s lives and to enable the women to participate in crafting their own biographical narrative through integrating their collections and (in Elvira Sheridan Badger’s case) their diaries.

[293] Hugh Campbell, “The Voice,” quoted in Rowley, 18.

## 1: Sounding Consumption: Harriet Burr Smith, Harriet F. Smith Brown, and Harriet C. Brown Artis

Harriet Burr (1819-1852) of Canton, Massachusetts began collecting music relatively late, at age twenty-five at the earliest.[294] She was still living with her mother, Sarah Burr, when she began collecting in 1844, and was still collecting when she met and married John W.B. Smith (1820-1897) on April 12, 1847. She continued acquiring music for the next few years, even after the birth of her first two children: a son, Oscar Kennard born later in the year in 1847, and a daughter, Emily, born in 1849. She had her volume bound sometime soon after Emily's birth, perhaps spurred by the birth of a daughter to preserve the music.

Harriet's collection, held at the Lester Levy Collection at Johns Hopkins, is fairly typical in its inclusion of popular sentimental songs, translated arias and lieder (from Bellini, Paesiello, Donizetti, and Spohr), Irish songs like "Jeanie o' the Glen," a few waltzes, a mazurka, and a quick step. In total, she collected twenty-three songs and ten piano pieces published in Boston from 1844 to 1849. Seven of these twenty-three songs deal with sickness or death which informed Harriet's own understanding of suffering and mourning. For example, through the performance of Samuel Lover's "My Mother Dear," Harriet reminisced about childhood sickness and a mother's plea to heaven on her behalf:

> In the sickness of my childhood,
> The perils of my prime,
> The sorrows of my riper years,
> The cares of ev'ry time;
> When doubt or danger weigh'd me down,
> Then pleading all for me,

[294] The publication dates of her music range from 1844-1849. Harriet Burr Bound Volume, Vol. 585, Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

It was a fervent pray'r to heav'n,
That bent my mother's knee.
My mother dear, My mother dear,
My gentle, gentle mother.[295]

In singing I.N. Metcalf's "The Willow Song, or, Voices from the Spirit Land," Harriet acted the part of a young boy, describing glimpses of a heavenly afterlife to his mother, who clutches him as tears fall "like April rain."[296] And in performing O.W. Withington's retexting of "Farewell! I will not Weep for Thee" to an excerpt from Bellini's *Norma,* Harriet inhabited the point of view of a lover who mourns for his departed beloved:

Farewell! I will not weep for thee,
Although though art no more.
And only faithful memory
Recalls thee as of yore:
I will not weep for thou has now
But pass'd from earthly sight,
While faith beholds thy youthful brow
More beautiful and bright.

Farewell! Past scenes we loved the most
Are left to me alone;
I think of thee—the early lost,
My beautiful—my own;—
And yet I cannot weep for thou,
From thy sweet home above,
Faith says—are smiling on me now,
With more than earthly love.[297]

Similarly, through G. Linley's "Though Art Gone from My Gaze," Harriet took on the role of the lover left behind. He seeks solitude to grieve, singing,

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[295] Samuel Lover, "My Mother Dear, A Favorite Ballad" (Boston: Oliver Ditson, n.d.).
[296] I.N. Metcalf, poetry by J. Wesley Hanson, "The Willow Song, or, Voices from the Spirit Land" (Boston: Ditson, 1847).
[297] Vincenzo Bellini, words and arrangement by O.W. Withington. "Farewell! I will not Weep for Thee" (Boston: Oakes, 1848).

Thou art gone from my gaze,
Like a beautiful dream,
And I seek thee in vain,
By the meadow and stream:
Oft I breathe thy dear name,
To the winds floating by,
But thy sweet voice is mute
To my bosom's lone sigh.[298]

Harriet performed these songs for her mother, Sarah, and later, for her husband and perhaps for her young children. All the while, Harriet was dying of consumption (see figure 3.5). In a narrative closely mirroring Julia Chase Merritt's from the opening of this chapter, Harriet became pregnant with her third child in the final stage of her illness and gave birth to another daughter, to whom (like Julia) she gave her name: Harriet F. Burr.

Figure 3.5. Death Record for Harriet Burr Smith. Massachusetts Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

Harriet F. only lived to age forty-four. Her early life was not only spent in the shadow of her mother's death, but also spent struggling with her own illness. Harriet F., like her mother, contracted consumption, presumably as an infant at her mother's side. Without the presence of her mother, she used her songs to imagine her, to mourn her, to understand her experience of her illness, and to cope with her own.

I am not sure when Harriet F. was diagnosed, but neither her high likelihood of catching consumption (since her mother had died from the disease) nor her diagnosis

[298] G. Linley, "Thou Art Gone from My Gaze" (Boston: Oakes, n.d.)

prevented her from marrying Joseph Lewis Brown on April 12, 1880. They had four daughters: Amelia Bell, Annie Estelle, Madeline, and, in carrying on her and her mother's name, Harriet Catherine Brown (1893-1923). Two years after the birth of her fourth daughter, Harriet F. finally passed away (see figure 3.6). Her experience of her illness and desire for a legacy led her, like her mother, to name her last daughter Harriet, and so another Harriet was left motherless, left to understand her mother through her siblings and the objects passed down to her, including her mother's songs.

Figure 3.6. Death record for Harriet Smith Brown. Massachusetts Death Records, 1841-1915. Accessed via Ancestry.com.

Harriet C. Brown married Fred Clarence Artis at age twenty. But only ten years later, at the age of thirty, she died, likely of the same disease that had claimed the life of her mother and grandmother, only now by a different name: tuberculosis. In this family, name, songbook, and disease were a matriarchal legacy, which ended their influence twenty years before there was a cure.

**2. Emma J. Barton Aldridge (1843-1907): Song and the Loss of Children**

Emma J. Barton Aldridge (1843-1907), of Colbert, Alabama, experienced loss early and repeatedly, experiences which are reflected in her song collection. A daughter living on a slave-owning plantation, Emma's sister Josephine died when Emma was two years old, her father died when she was four, her sister Susannah died when Emma was

seven, and her brother Hugh died when she was eleven. She married Samuel H. Aldridge Jr. (1839-1880), but he soon passed away at the age of forty, when Emma was only thirty-seven and without children. Emma then moved in with her sister Mary and lived a seemingly comfortable life, maintaining an active role in Colbert society, and even acting as a charter member of the Colbert Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1907.

Emma's binder's volume,[299] held at the Library of Congress, includes seventy-six songs in total.[300] Out of these songs, fifteen are about death (constituting 19.7% of the volume). Six of these are about the death of a child, and their publication dates range from when Emma was twenty-one to twenty-seven years old: C.A. White's "Put Me in My Little Bed" (1870), "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" (1866), Leslie's "Rock Me to Sleep Mother" (1864), M. Keller's "Mother, Oh! Sing Me to Rest," George Root's "Kiss Me, Mother, Kiss your Darling" (1864), and Stephen Foster's "Under the Willow She's Sleeping."

[299] Emma J. Aldridge Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 88, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[300] However, there is a lost volume as indicated by a note— "2 vols" – which appears on the flyleaf. Since there is no piano music in this volume, the other volume may be completely instrumental. I have found that many women would choose to separate vocal and instrumental music into separate volumes when they owned enough music to fill two volumes.

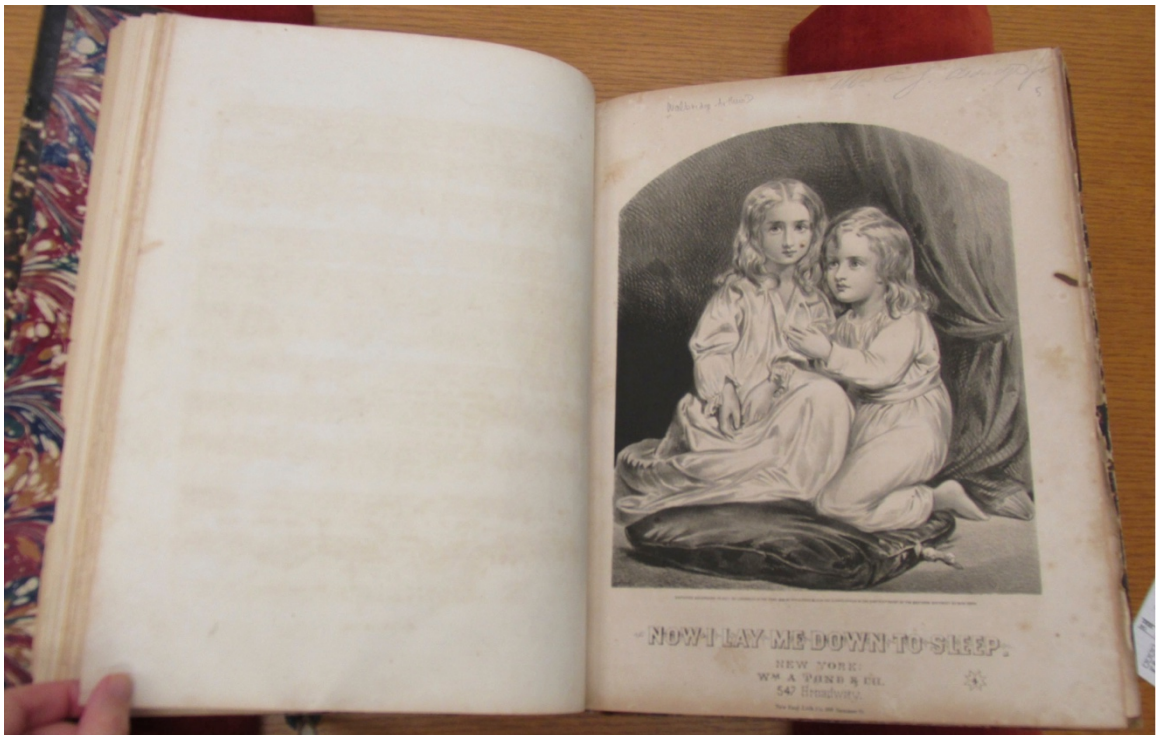


Figure 3.7. Cover of Arthur D. Walbridge, words by Hattie A. Fox, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1866). In Emma J. Aldridge Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 88, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

The cover of "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" (figure 3.7)[301] features two sisters in white nightgowns, kneeling on a velvet pillow. On the left, one sister's hands lay listlessly in her lap, her nightgown loose, untied, and sleeves unbuttoned, as she stares sadly out at the viewer. She appears to be almost floating, raised slightly above her sister, and her legs are undefined underneath the fabric of her gown. The child on the right, in contrast, stares to the viewer's left, at a seemingly fixed point, and her hands are together

[301] Arthur D. Walbridge, words by Hattie A. Fox, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1866).

in prayer. The sash at her waist is tied snuggly and she clearly kneels in prayer on the pillow. The lyrics clarify the meaning of the image:

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,"
> And the blue eyes, dark and deep,
> Let their snowy curtains down,
> Edged with fringes golden brown.
>
> "All day long, the angels fair,
> I've been watching over there;
> Heav'ns not far,
> 'tis just in sight.
> Now they're calling me, goodnight;
> Kiss me, mother,
> Do not weep,
> Now I lay me down to sleep."
>
> "Over there, just over there,
> I shall say my morning pray'r;
> Kiss me mother, do not weep,
> Now I lay me down to sleep."
>
> Tangl'd ringlets, all smooth now,
> Looped back from the waxen brow;
> Little hands so dimpl'd, white,
> Clasp'd together cold tonight.
>
> Where the mossy, daisied sod,
> Brought sweet messages from God,
> Two pale lips with kisses press'd,
> There we left her to her rest,
> And the dews of ev'ning weep,
> Where we laid her down to sleep.
>
> Over there, just over there,
> List the angels morning pray'r;
> Lispings low thro' fancy creep,
> Now I lay me down to sleep.[302]

[302] Walbridge and Fox, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" (New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1866).

The child on the left, gazing knowingly out at the viewer, stares at the approaching glory of the afterlife, calmly welcoming death while her sister prays for her survival. This song was published in 1866, when Emma was already twenty-three years old. Since she had no children of her own, and so never suffered the death of her own child, the song undoubtedly called to mind the siblings she lost in her youth.

**3. Elvira Sheridan Badger, Revisited**

Elvira Sheridan Badger's biography and binder's volumes were first investigated in chapter two for the role they played in Elvira's understanding, construction, and performance of her own ethnic and racial identity. Here, her diaries will add to this narrative, revealing her everyday experience of struggle and loss, so prominent even in the life of a (relatively) healthy upper-class woman in Chicago. Elvira's diaries are set up to allow only short entries for each day, since the dates are already printed on every page. Most of what Elvira records are the little everyday events in the lives of herself, A.C. (who she refers to as "Mr. Badger"), and their children: the report always begins with a description of the weather; then she discusses the children's health and illnesses, milestones, clothes, and attendance at dancing school or singing school; her own sewing projects and visits to friends; and Mr. Badger's trips to work and to the gymnasium. But she also keeps track of the major events in the lives of her friends, which mostly amount to a record of births and deaths.

Forty-four pieces in Elvira's volumes are vocal works and were published between 1836 and 1848 (years when Elvira was four to seventeen). Though there is no

temporal overlap between the publication and collection of the songs and Elvira's diary entries, we can view her songbook as informing her recurrent interactions with, and mourning of, illness and death. For this case study, I've inserted text from Elvira's songs and diary entries into the biographical narrative. I'll pick up Elvira's biography where I left off in chapter two, in 1850, though her diaries do not begin until 1859.

Elvira's marriage to A.C. Badger in 1850, as discussed in chapter two, resulted in her ascension to a higher circle of society and wealth and her subsequent move from Louisville to Chicago in 1861. On April 4, 1855, with two daughters already, Belle and Eva, aged four and two, Elvira gave birth to her third daughter, Mary Virginia. At fourteen months old, Mary Virginia contracted whooping cough and died. A fourth daughter, Ada Camille was born in 1857. Elvira's first diary entry was made on January 1, 1859, when she was in the third trimester of her pregnancy with her first son, Sheridan Stanwood.

The first major event in her own life that she records in the diaries is the birth of Sheridan and the rocky weeks that followed. Elvira's ill health after delivery kept her confined to bed for weeks, but that did not change her concern for the lives of her family, friends, and neighbors. Set alongside the routine details of her daily life, her concerns for her own health and the health of her baby seem cursory.

Similarly, even when Elvira's oldest daughter Belle contracted typhoid in September of that same year, Elvira noted the stages of her illness with the same weight as the daily weather. I've included some excerpts from several entries below, to demonstrate Elvira's clipped narrative style, and her tendency to set the mundane next to

the monumental:

> Sept. 10: [First mention of Belle's illness, Elvira writes at top of page:] "Belle Typhoid." [In her entry for that day, she records:] "Baby vaccinated." [and] "Did not go to Opera to night it rained."
>
> Sept. 12: "Pa called and took me to Opera of *Lucretia Borgia* and *Traviata* it was fine. Parodi – grand – Mr. Badger did not go – David and Mr. Shreve then rode up to house – [which is] nearly done."
> …
>
> Oct. 15: "Brother [Sheridan] has his first tooth to day—Mr. Badger going to Opera – with Sallie Hunt & Miss Polk – David called and invited me to go to opera – Brother eight months old and 2 weeks."
>
> Oct. 24: "Shaved off Belle's Hair because it was falling out."
>
> Oct. 26: "Mr. Besmet's child got killed by drinking lye—this is a most lovely day it is our Indian Summer—children gone to Mrs. Schulter's to get some cakes to take Grandma Badger for her dinner—we are invited there at five to meet Mrs. Sturwood & Hitton–Belle still getting on slowly—Siss [and her] baby came to see us & Virginia called to take me to ride—Belle [feels] better—Ada has a very bad cold – went to Mr. Badger's and stayed until eleven o'clock—while we were all sitting there Uncle Isaac Sherwood arrived. We had a delightful time. One of Mrs. Robert Belk's children fell over the bannister this afternoon and got killed."[303]

Belle survived her illness, but the lack of recorded concern about her in Elvira's diary is notable. Elvira's late daughter, Mary Virginia, is not mentioned in the 1859 diary at all until December. Because Mary Virginia didn't figure into her mother's everyday life, she isn't recorded in the diary. But in December, when Sheridan contracts the measles, Elvira remembers the earlier illness that took Mary Virginia's life:

> Dec. 16: "To day was very pretty children out walking. Dr. Rogers came to see Baby Brother for last time Measles all gone in – cough not so bad – received wedding tickets of Myra Gray & Mr. Bondurunt – Siss came to inquire after baby – Virginia also – Ada has not taken measles yet. I think she had them when the

[303] MMS Badger Diary, 1859, Box 1, Folder 1, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

other children had them two years ago. I lost a lovely babe 14 months old with whooping cough – Belle & Eva had it same time. Little Mary Virginia had it."[304]

Elvira's seemingly flippant treatment of illness and death is partly a symptom of the format of the entry-a-day diary, but it also reflects a profound familiarity with death. A familiarity not just due to her daughter's death, but the deaths of her friends and their children, her more distant relatives, and her neighbors. Death was an everyday experience, as shown by the many she records in her daily entries.

Oh leave me to my sorrow,
For my heart is oppressed today;
Oh leave me and tomorrow
Dark shadows may pass away.
There's a time when all that grieves us,
Is felt with a deeper gloom,
There's a time when all that grieves us,
Is felt with a deeper gloom,
There's a time when hope deceives us,
And we dream of bright days to come.

In winter from the mountain,
The stream like a torrent flows;
In summer the same fountain,
Is calm as a child's repose.
Thus in grief the first pangs wound us,
And tears of despair gush on,
Time brings forth new flowers around us,
And the tide of our grief is done.[305]

Turning to the back cover of the small leather-bound 1859 diary, Elvira tucked a long lock of straight, light brown hair, tied with a piece of light blue ribbon and wrapped in a scrap of paper. On the paper is scribbled: "Minnie Wilder Feb 21 1861 died."

[304] MMS Badger Diary, 1859, Box 1, Folder 1, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.
[305] Sofce, Henry D., lyrics by Thomas Moore, "Oh! Please leave me to my Sorrow" (Cincinnati; Louisville: Peters, 1848). This song provided a model of grieving: to feel sadness, but that in time the grief would subside and she would find happiness again.

Growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, Elvira developed a friendship with Ruth Jane Sevier (1833-1915). Ruth married Edward Wilder in 1852, and gave birth to their daughter, Minnie Key on January 28, 1854. Minnie was Ruth's only child, and died in 1861 at the age of seven. Ruth wrapped up a lock of Minnie's hair and sent it to Chicago, to her childhood friend, Elvira. Though it is not certain that Elvira met the child, since she moved to Chicago a year before her birth, Belle preserved the child's lock of hair in her diary forever. It is clear from the preservation of such a memento that, though she didn't record it in words, Elvira mourned Minnie's death and certainly even more so, the death of her own child.

Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond mem'ry brings the light
of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears, of childhood's years,
The words of love then spoken,
The eyes that shone, now dimm'd and gone
The cheerful hearts now broken!

When I remember all the friends,
So link'd together,
I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!

Thus in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain had bound me,
Sad mem'ry brings the light

of other days around me.[306]

Elvira finally elaborates on her own feelings of loss in a later diary entry from 1875. When dealing with the sudden death of another daughter, Eva, at age twenty-two, she recalls the death of Mary Virginia nineteen years previously. On June 1, 1875, Eva had been married a year, was full-term in her first pregnancy, and took ill with a cold. Elvira wrote, "all of us well but Eva she has taken cold and has fever and pains and been compelled to go up to her room, so I followed her and remained with her."

> June 2: "Eva don't feel well, so she has gone to her room, I went up and stayed all afternoon with her, she took her powder and at 12 in the night she called for me. I went up and labor had begun but worked very slowly, she suffering all night. Sent for Dr. Small and Mr. Nelson at one o'clock in the night or morning, a little daughter was born weighing 8 pounds, and the Doctor announced another and at three sure enough another little girl was born weighing eight pounds."
>
> June 3: "We were up all night and this morning. Eva became quite exhausted and continued so until five o'clock and then her beautiful life went out, much to the surprise of Doctor and the Nurses. It is a fearful thunderbolt to all of us, as she continued so well for so long a time, Catie Lunt had a son born at the same time, it is a severe blow to us all, and crowds of friends have flocked to us. Eva leaves the beautiful babes. Mrs. Nicholson and Lena will have to take care of them. To morrow my sisters arrive. Words cannot describe our loss, my beautiful Eva is gone, she was a Christian child from her early youth, always beautiful in her character as a daughter, as a sister, and a friend. Truly we are sorely afflicted and the whole community seems to feel it. We will miss her merry laugh everywhere, always patient confiding and loving, her brothers and sisters will long mourn her loss. *She was too good to live.*"
>
> June 4: Describes funeral preparations, then speaks again of the twins: "the babies are doing well, we have put them on the bottle. They are beautiful babies and weigh eight pounds apiece. It is no wonder that their poor young mother had to give up her life. Oh how my heart bleeds."

[306] John Stevenson, words by Thomas Moore, "Oft in the Stilly Night" (New York: V. Thurston, n.d.). Song text describes remembrance of childhood, and lost childhood friends that perhaps resonated with the mourning of her own childhood friend.

> June 6: "It is to be a sad day to us all. This is the day that we are to lay away our precious beautiful child Eva in the cold ground, her death has caused a great panic among our friends, and hearts are bleeding all over the city for us in our sad bereavement. Truly we need their sympathy, for *we have lost one too beautiful, too good to live*." She describes the gifts and services in detail, including the hymns sung. Then describes Eva's widower: "Mr. Angill became little composed with us, but when we arrived at the grave, Mr. Hearky(?) had the grave covered with flowers and when the casket was lowered, it looked like in a garden, poor Mr. Angell knelt at the grave like one lost, it made one's heart ache."[307]

Here, Elvira calls upon the familiar themes from consumption literature and songs: Christian piety in life (suggesting an afterlife in Heaven) and goodness and beauty that somehow perfectly suited Eva to die.

Eva was buried at Graceland Cemetery and the twins were baptized and given the names Ada and Belle Badger. A few weeks later, Elvira decided to have the remains of her other departed daughter, Mary Virginia, moved from their original burial place to be placed beside Eva at Graceland. The move prompted Elvira to experience Mary Virginia's death once again both emotionally and materially: she inspected the baby's body, had it laid out in the parlor, and had prayers said over it, just as she had done nineteen years previously.

> June 25, 1875: "My dear baby Mary Virginia has been taken up to day and her [??] casket put in a new [plot? In Chicago] and wonderful to tell her face and form is in perfect preservation, everything just a we laid her away. I have not been out to day… our little Casket was carried up in our Carriage."

> June 27, 1875: "It still rains, we rode in the Car at seven o'clock was a little behind time, did not arrive until eight. Met at the Cars, Mr. Badger, Shreve, Ada, Mattie Faulds, and Tommy Shreve, found all our family well. All of us walked up to our house, but Mr. Angill and Mr. Badger, they came up to our house in our carriage with the remains of Mary Virginia our little baby, who died nineteen

[307] MMS Badger Diary, 1875, Box 1, Folder 3, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago. Emphases mine.

years ago, had her Casket placed in the parlour sent for Dr. Locke to say prayers and Mrs. Hilton, Mr. Badger's Sister, at two o'clock. Mr. Hearty(?) and Belle and Mr. Badger went out first to have her grave dug by Eva."[308]

I cannot forget thee,
Thy spirit is here,
Unseen and unheard thou art still ever near,
Tho' long days have pass'd since together we met,
Thine image still haunts me,
I cannot forget,
Thine image still haunts me,
I cannot forget.

When the soft sighing breeze wafts its melody near,
Thy voice sweetly warbling in fancy I hear;
When bright loving visions at eventide gleam,
I see thee before me in glorious dream.

On my heart thy bright image its impress has made,
That impress nor absence nor distance shall fade;
But here in my soul will I cherish thee yet,
I have seen thee and loved thee, I cannot forget.[309]

When Eva died, Elvira experienced Mary Virginia's death again, mourning in a way that perhaps she wasn't able to while still in her childbearing years. But for Elvira, the diary was not usually the place she made this mourning evident. It wasn't in words, but in song, in actions, and in material and ritualistic memorial within the parlor and at the grave—the making and remaking of her parlor, the placement of the burial plots, and in her binder's volume and performance—that Elvira's grief was both material and performative.

[308] MMS Badger Diary, 1875, Box 1, Folder 3, Elvira Sheridan Badger Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago
[309] W.C. Peters, "I Cannot Forget Thee!" (NY: Firth, 1847).

## Conclusion

The Victorian experience of illness, death, and mourning was rooted in the material. Bodies were monitored, inspected, and mimicked through fashion, art, literature, and song; and they were memorialized through art and keepsakes in the parlor. Death was at once more mysterious while being tragically familiar and proximal, and more gruesome but romanticized. Through collecting and singing songs about death, women maintained their role as curator of the family memorial in the parlor, and caretaker of the ill and dead. The songs reflect not just morbid fantasies, but a familiarity with illness and death; and they provided women with a model of mourning that infiltrated their understanding of loss and perhaps helped to alleviate their grief. Seen in this light, these intra-actions among women and objects informed and perhaps aided their experiences of loss. But the songs also served to reify ideal feminine frailty. The songs' presence in the volumes foregrounded death and illness (and consumption in particular) as an essential facet of women's identities.

This frailty was constructed and performed not only through song collections, but also through corseting and song performance. Consumption, the deadliest disease, was defined solely through its material impact on the body and served to redefine material beauty. Through corseting, women materially altered their bodies to mimic the effects of consumption while presumably increasing their own susceptibility to it. As discussed in chapter one, corseting's impact on the body also affected women's musical capabilities and timbral quality, possibly contributing to composer's compositional choices. Thus textual and musical topics that reflect death and mourning, and women's timbral quality

and material presence, aided in reifying contemporary notions of ideal feminine weakness. This link between real bodily experience, musical topics, timbral quality, and gender performativity is a useful one, and could be fruitful to discussions of both amateur and professional performances not restricted to this time period.

The associations examined in this chapter did not remain stable for long. Customs and norms revolving around consumption, womanhood, fashion, binder's volumes, mourning rituals, and parlors all transformed radically during the Gilded Age. The near simultaneous shifts in the cultural use and understanding of each is further evidence of their deep-seated connection.

At the end of the nineteenth century, parlors featured less and less in home designs, as families instead dedicated funds to spaces intended for everyday use rather than for special occasions.[310] Burkette notes that between 1880 and 1930, family events shifted from inside the home to outside, for instance, "instead of a family using its own parlor for the rituals surrounding death—viewings, visitations, and funerals—these ceremonies were moved to *funeral parlors.*"[311]That spatial distancing resulted in a material distancing from death: death was taken outside of the home into hospitals and funeral homes, women were no longer in charge of caring for the deceased, and the cultural practice of curating bodily mementos (post-mortem portraiture, locks of hair, etc.) declined. Interestingly, this parallels the end of the binder's volume's reign; the practice reached its height in the 1870s before beginning a steep decline. Dress reform once again

[310] Burkette, 401.
[311] Burkette, 401.

gained traction in the Gilded Age, and would gain in popularity in the first two decades of the twentieth century, causing the corset to decline rapidly in popularity.

And as we'll see in the next chapter, womanhood also underwent a profound change during this time: ideal femininity changed from an image defined by frailty to one infused with physical health and energy. Koch's publication of his Tuberculosis findings in 1882 has been underestimated in its relationship to this new conception of womanhood. Though treatments did not improve, the nation was now aware that TB was an infectious disease caused by the transmission of bacteria that affected both men and women equally. It was *not* something hereditary, something that came from within, nor was it something that women could trigger through corseting. TB was no longer an inherent quality of femininity, and thus the most pernicious evidence for women's innate frailty fell away. TB was now something that could potentially be resisted through individual strength. This undoubtedly contributed to the strength of the ideal modern woman, so ubiquitous in the displays at the Woman's Building in 1893, which will be the focus of chapter four.

## Chapter Four: Discovering Women: Women's Constructions of Modernity at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition

Musical collection provided women with means for the control, organization, and aestheticization of material artifacts within private settings. But as the nineteenth century wore on, the expertise women gained in domestic domains increasingly became a fulcrum for public engagement. Scholars like Candace Bailey and Judith Tick have traced these types of transitions, focusing on women who moved from domestic performance to compositional careers. But perhaps we can also recognize similar shifts within the lives of women collectors more broadly, not solely women who became professional musicians. In her study of women's art collections, Dianne Sachko Macleod notes that through collection women were psychologically prepared to engage in public life. Collection within the domestic space, she writes, often "increased confidence and self-expression…[and] led the New Women of the Progressive Era to focus their attention outside the home."[312] With finely-honed musical, artistic, and managerial skills developed at home, women emerged into the public realm. In venturing into domains traditionally closed to them, women constituted an emergent public sphere, one that, following Habermas, enabled them to meet, debate, and critique established norms.[313]

Certainly, women's expertise and resulting confidence is only one of many reasons for the increased presence of women in public life during the Gilded Age.

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[312] Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800-1940* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008), 18.
[313] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

Women's involvement in the Abolition and Temperance movements during the antebellum period and in women's service organizations during the Civil War created a momentum that fueled the campaign for women's rights. Starting around mid-century, the women's club movement fostered the formation of major national organizations like the National American Woman Suffrage Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Council for Women, and Daughters of the American Revolution. Women achieved more widespread advancement through increased educational opportunities. Most women now had access to elementary and secondary education and in fact, in 1890, more girls than boys earned high school diplomas. Women's colleges proliferated in the post-war years, especially in the Northeast, and more and more women found employment outside of the home. But workingwomen were still the minority: only around twenty percent of women were wage earners in 1900.[314] Lois Banner notes the vast improvements in women's healthcare and, as a result, life expectancy rose and birthrates plummeted.

Women's slowly improving legal, educational, and material conditions had a notable impact on notions of ideal womanhood. And because of their increased access to organizations and public spaces, women wielded more direct control over the creation and maintenance of this updated image. Women with more radical leanings participated in remaking the prevailing image of the ideal Victorian lady into a new image of a modern, resilient woman. Rather than a wife and mother, completely confined to the

[314] Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (San Diego; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 6. Banner notes that this figure is disputed by many historians, who believe it ignores the episodic nature of women's labor, and women working from home.

home and defined by domestic roles and essential frailty, the new ideal woman was active and strong, even if this activity was still restricted by the stays of gendered expectations. Alternately called the "New Woman," the "Columbian Woman," and later the "Twentieth-Century Woman," this transgressive figure, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes, "constituted a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon…[and] challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power."[315]

But this image was not every woman's ideal. Indeed, as women gained public spaces for the construction of their own ideal womanhood, the attributes of the ideal were hotly contested. The image of the modern woman became a battling ground between two divergent sides of the Gilded Age woman's movement: similar to what Lisa Tickner has termed the "Militant Woman" (the suffragette, the radical) and the "Womanly Woman" (the woman of the auxiliary, the philanthropist).[316] While at times these variants seem to be mutually exclusive, I argue that they are both essential to our understanding of modernism. This follows Rita Felski's call for a broader understanding of modernity that includes consideration of women's agency. She writes,

> How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What *difference* would such a procedure make?[317]

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[315] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 245.
[316] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).
[317] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 10.

Any attempt to respond to these questions requires first locating spaces in which women from both sides of the debate had the capacity for self-construction, and in which that construction was self-consciously modern. The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 provided that space. It created a model of modernity and allotted women unprecedented control in the programming of exhibits and activities, albeit in a separate space. Within the whitewashed walls of the Woman's Building, the "Board of Lady Managers" constructed and articulated their visions of modern womanhood.

Scholars have mined the women's exhibits at the World's Columbian Exposition for modernist impulses in art, literature, science, and politics. Ann Feldman,[318] Judith Tick,[319] and Adrienne Fried Block[320] have discussed women's musical activities at the Fair as a rare and profound moment when professional women musicians—especially Amy Beach—were visible, even central in a slate of events intended to demonstrate women's progress.

But more than just a measure of progress, women's activities at the Fair created a clash of contrasting conceptions of modern womanhood—a clash between tradition and innovation, maternalism and feminism, and rurality and urbanity—which covered the walls in women's art and permeated the air with women's music. The walls of the Woman's Building, like the covers of her binder's volume or the laces of her corset,

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[318] Ann E. Feldman, "Being Heard: Women Composers and Patrons at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," *Notes* 47, no. 1 (September 1990): 7-20.
[319] Judith Tick, "Passed Away is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870-1900," in *Women Making Music—The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950,* edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 325-348.
[320] Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian, The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867-1944* (New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

marked the boundaries of a constructed performance of womanhood. The Woman's Building expanded parlor identity performance to a monumental scale for the public's consumption. The substance of this public performance were fiercely debated, but eventually controlled by Women's Board President Bertha Honoré Palmer. But the exhibits in the completed Woman's Building revealed in material artifacts the tensions between the two sides of the Gilded Age women's right's movement. These tensions are also evident in the music programmed by women at the Fair. While the commissioned orchestral works discussed by Feldman, Tick, and Block show women's increased activity in traditionally male musical domains, the semi-monthly concerts at the Woman's Building were dominated by parlor songs on sentimental texts, performed largely by amateurs.[321]

Reading the Woman's Building as defining a monolithic new womanhood risks erasing the struggles of those whose voices went unheard in its planning. The very disagreements and complexity that challenged the Board of Lady Managers reveal a central facet of women's construction of modernity. Avoiding the pitfall of privileging radical feminist resistance over other equally modernist performances, this chapter takes divergent and at times seemingly contradictory constructions into account, allotting women agency in defining their own modernism. I will examine women's fashion, concert programming, speeches on music and women's rights, along with other arts and ideologies that were all packaged and labeled "modern woman" for the world's

[321] Ann Feldman, Notes for *Women at an Exposition,* CD-ROM (Chicago: Classic Digital, Inc., University of Chicago, 1991).

consumption. I will show that in contemporary thought, there were still deep and seemingly innate connections between ideal womanhood, class, beauty, and waist size, but now, a demonstration of power and agency rather than frailty. The women's self-conscious negotiations between tradition and modernity reveal tensions between choice and control, agency and mass consumption that perfectly illustrate the issues at work throughout the nineteenth century, but now moved out of the parlor and into the spotlight. I argue that the Woman's Building can be read as the culmination of a century of women's identity performances with and through mass-produced art, and as an alternate understanding of modernity: one defined by mixture.

**The Government Discovers Women**

The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition took place in 1893 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World. 644 acres on Chicago's South Side were transformed into a model for the ideal city. And it was a city in every respect, with whitewashed classicist structures connected by walkways and waterways, with water features, sculptures, and public buildings.

Three years before the Fair, in 1890, Chicago was awarded hosting rights by the "Quadro-Centennial Committee," and the World's Fair Bill set up two managing bodies: the World's Fair Chicago Corporation, responsible for all the actual planning, finance, and running of the Fair and the World's Columbian Commission, which held administrative powers. The Fair Bill was approved by the Senate then went before the

House, where Illinois Representative William Springer wrote a very vague and seemingly unnoticed amendment, which read:

> And said Commission is authorized and required to appoint a Board of Lady Managers of such numbers and to perform such duties as may be prescribed by said Commission. Said Board may appoint one or more members of all committees authorized to award prizes for exhibits which may be produced in whole or in part by female labor.[322]

Jeanne Madeline Weimann notes that after Chicago won the hosting rights, considerable "agitation… went on while Congress was actually voting on the Fair Bill… and no one paid too much attention to the Springer [amendment]."[323] Indeed, the only discussion of the amendment occurred when it was accidentally omitted. Springer noted its absence, it was reinserted, and the Bill passed.

The ease with which the U.S. government approved Springer's amendment belies its importance. In his opening address to the first meeting of the Woman's Board, the President of the National Commission and known suffragist, Thomas Palmer emphasized the historic nature of the amendment:

> It is the first time… in the history of our government that woman has been fully recognized in the ministration of a great public trust like this and the action of Congress in passing the bill with this feature has met the general approval of our people.[324]

In his retrospective book, *History of the World's Fair,* journalist Benjamin Truman recalled,

> In no previous exposition has woman essayed so important and conspicuous a part as she has been called upon to perform at the Great Columbian Exposition of

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[322] Quoted in Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1981), 33.
[323] Weimann, 35.
[324] Quote from President Thomas Palmer contained in the Board of Lady Mangers Official Record, Nov. 19, 1890, Volumes of the Board of Lady Managers. Research Center, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

> 1893. At no time in her history has she been accorded such a place as she now occupies as an integral part of a mammoth display of the achievements of mankind.[325]

The most remembered comment on the significance of woman's involvement came from the as-always straightforward president of the Board of Lady Managers, Bertha Honoré Palmer. In her address to the enormous crowd gathered for the Fair's Opening Day Celebrations on May 1, 1893, she confidently claimed that, "Even more important than the discovery of Columbus which we are gathered here to celebrate, is the fact that the general government has just discovered women."[326]

After the passing of the Fair Bill with Springer's amendment, the National Commission was set to appoint the lady managers at the end of the summer of 1890. The commission thus spent the season fending off bouquets of flowers, gifts, and unexpected calls from representatives of the various women's clubs who were now vying for control of the Board of Lady Managers.[327]

The two most vocal rival woman's groups were the Isabella Society—a society named for Queen Isabella, who the society thought should be given the credit for the discovery of the new world, rather than Columbus—and the Chicago Women's Auxiliary. Eventually, the Commission decided to try to please everyone, and appointed two representatives from every state and nine more from Chicago, while assuring that the

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[325] Benjamin C. Truman, *History of the World's Fair; being a complete description of the World's Columbian exposition from its inception* (Chicago: Mammoth Publishing Company, 1893). Quoted in Wanda Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 65.
[326] Bertha Honoré Palmer, "Work of the Board of Lady Managers," Opening Address delivered May 1, 1893. Printed in *A Souvenir of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Landing of Columbus* (Chicago, 1893).
[327] Weimann, 40.

Isabellas and the Auxiliary were equally represented. The resulting Board was composed of 117 middle- to upper-class white Lady Managers, with an equal number of alternates. This made the woman's board the largest governing body for the World's Fair, beating the National Commission itself, which had 108 members.[328]

At the first meeting of the Board of Lady Managers in November 1890, several women voiced hesitancy about their new power, and constantly questioned its boundaries. After much confused debate, Mrs. Logan submitted a resolution:

> Resolved, that a committee of eight be appointed on a Permanent Organization, who shall be authorized to consider with the Executive Committee of the Commission as to what we are expected to do and how we are to do it.[329]

Compounding anxieties about new-found leadership and such complete uncertainty as to their role, the National Commission's decision to appoint members from both the radical suffragist Isabellas with the more traditional, philanthropic Auxiliary created a Board fraught with internal power struggles. These struggles intensified after the Auxiliary gained control of the Board's executive committee, led by Auxiliary leader and Chicago socialite Bertha Honoré Palmer.

Bertha Honoré (1849-1918) was the daughter of a successful Kentucky businessman who moved his family to Chicago when Bertha was six. She was a model debutante and in June 1867, she graduated from finishing school in Washington D.C. with honors in all subjects, including piano, harp, and vocal music.[330] In 1870, she

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[328] Weimann, 39-40.
[329] The Board of Lady Mangers Official Record, Nov. 19, 1890.
[330] Hope L. Black, "Mounted on a Pedestal: Bertha Honoré Palmer" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2007), 30-31.

married Potter Palmer, the richest bachelor in Chicago who was twenty-three years her senior. As a young married socialite, Bertha Honoré Palmer wielded her musical and other domestic accomplishments to solidify her social standing among Chicago's elite and aid philanthropic causes; Hope Black notes that her Lake Shore home "was the showplace of Chicago and the scene of sumptuous galas, musicales, and charity balls, ostensibly to obtain funds for the needy while enhancing the social status of the host."[331] But in 1890, her broad skillset became useful in ways she probably hadn't predicted, as she was the first woman to be elected to an official government-allotted office.

With her considerable support gained from within the Board itself, her connections to Chicago elites, and her husband's position as second vice president of the Chicago Corporation and member of both the Committee on Grounds and Buildings and the Committee of Fine Arts, Palmer was ultimately able to secure for the Board complete power over all women's involvement at the Fair, and thus gained access to every exhibit and $200,000 of government funding. These accomplishments are especially impressive in light of the Board's uncertain beginnings and the constant political maneuvering required to overpower Palmer's critics and keep the Board united and productive.

The Board's most fundamental disagreement, over whether to have a separate "Woman's Building" on the fairgrounds, gained national news coverage. The discontented but determined Isabellas pushed for women's full inclusion within every department on the fairgrounds, while Palmer and other Auxiliary members thought women would be best represented in their own building. The Woman's Building

[331] Black, 49.

eventually became a reality, but only after a public scandal surrounding Palmer and Board secretary (and Isabella member) Phoebe Couzins. Couzins, a successful lawyer and outspoken suffragette, publically accused Palmer of altering Board meeting minutes, thus empowering herself to appoint a committee that decided on the creation of the Woman's Building against the wishes of the Board majority. Couzins was fired at the next meeting of the Board, with the building plans already underway. Indeed, because of Palmer's social power and political savvy, her vision for women's participation in the Fair prevailed in most cases. The loss of Couzins' input on the Board's executive committee resulted in less representation not only for the radical Isabellas, but also for middle-class workingwomen. Their view of modern womanhood was not one to which Palmer was willing to give voice in the Woman's Building.

**The Modern Woman as Strong, Active, & Agent**

> *The ideal of the American woman is to be respectable without being bored.*
> -Edith Wharton, The Custom of the Country*, 1910.*[332]

But even Palmer's personal vision of modern womanhood reflected the split between honoring women's traditional roles and advocating for increased rights. This is evident in her speech given at the opening ceremonies of the Woman's Building. She attacked the prejudice against women in the workforce, blamed women's confinement to the home as the main obstacle to their success, and condemned the horrible conditions for

[332] Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1913), 274. Quoted in Barbara Peters Smith, "From White City to Green Acres: Bertha Palmer and the Gendering of Space in the Gilded Age" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2015), 7.

women engaging in industrial labor. But later in the speech, her rhetoric took a sharp turn, as she sought to praise women excelling in their traditional sphere. She said that she spoke for the Board when she said: "Every woman who is presiding over a happy home is *fulfilling her highest and truest function*, and could not be lured from it by temptation offered by factories or studies."[333] This fundamental conflict—between a vision of womanhood as publicly engaged on the one hand and as ideally and biologically suited for homemaking and caretaking on the other—is evident both in the Board and in its President, and inevitably permeated every aspect of women's participation at the Fair.[334]

William Andrews argues that one place where the two sides of this conflict converged is in the image of the American woman as healthy and active; the conflict, then, was between an image of a healthy and active wife and mother and a healthy and active woman of work and political action. Andrews writes, "whether she sews, designs and runs machinery, cares for children, creates art, attends college, runs an orphanage, or writes, the woman is shown to be aggressive and successful."[335] The theme of health and activity was a common thread throughout speeches, exhibits, and art in the Woman's Building. This suggests that though many aspects of Victorian femininity still held sway, the ideal feminine frailty of the antebellum and war years was dying out, replaced by an

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[333] Bertha H. Palmer, speech delivered at opening of Woman's Building, May 1, 1893. Quoted in John Hutton, "Picking Fruit: Mary Cassatt's "Modern Woman" and the Woman's Building of 1893," *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 326. Emphasis mine.

[334] This conflict has been noted by many scholars, including Reid Badger, Alan Trachtenberg, and Judy Sund.

[335] William D. Andrews, "Women and the Fairs of 1876 and 1893," *The Hayes Historical Journal: A Journal of the Gilded Age* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1977). http://www.rbhayes.org/hayes/content/files/Hayes_Historical_Journal/women_and_the_fairs.htm (accessed December 22, 2015).

ideal of strength. This shift from an idealized feminine frailty to womanly strength was, as we've seen, partly the result of women's increased public activity, education, and improved healthcare (especially the better understanding of TB). It was also related to the imagined woman of the Western frontier, which was so central to the contemporary national imagination. In addition, the new emphasis on physical health, itself related to the craze for the bicycle and its cross-gender marketing, also fed the image's development.

While I agree that strength featured prominently in women's art, exhibits, and speeches at the Fair, Andrews' argument glosses over the essential differences in the women's views (differences the women themselves would have been quick to point out), and erases the struggles of those whose voices went unheard. In simplifying the historical narrative to retrospectively make everyone get along, we lose the complexity of the movement; complexity, I argue, which is a central facet of women's construction of modernity. In a similar manner, Judy Sund's preference for the feminist agenda and villainization of the traditionalists as outside of progress reproduces the exclusion of the existing historical narrative. Studying both the conflict within the creation of modern womanhood and the constructed unity of the eventual outcome is necessary. Understanding the outcome helps us to appreciate women's achievements within their historical context and credit the agency and power of women's coalitions. Recognizing the conflict gives agency to individual women, and enhances our understanding of modernity to include a mess of divergent voices.

**Africans on Display, African Americans Displaced**

This is especially important in discussions of the World's Columbian Exposition, because the mixture of perspectives that were actually allotted space at the Fair were not all-encompassing. Indeed, Black women were almost completely excluded from participation in the Fair. The struggles of various Black women's groups for representation on the Board of Lady Managers reproduces the major tensions between the budding white feminist movement and Black women more broadly. Black women's exclusion was a result of the Lady Managers' condescending and discriminatory views, Palmer's anxieties about offending Southern ladies less than thirty years after the Civil War, and white women's fears that the inclusion of Black women would weaken their claim for political equality. In addition, the gendered politics restricting the Lady Manager's actions prevented them from allowing more inclusion than their parent (or "husband"[336]) Commission. But perhaps most troubling is the very real possibility that Palmer denied African Americans' inclusion because adding yet another dissenting voice to the board would weaken her power and further complicate her construction of modern American womanhood in the Woman's Building.

While Palmer struggled to keep the "Couzins Affair" to a simmer, schoolteacher and black Chicago women's leader Lettie Trent approached Palmer to advocate for African American participation in the Fair. By this point, African Americans had made

[336] After Judge King, member of the National Commission, gave a complimentary address to the Board of Lady Managers, Isabella Beecher Hooker said, "I would like to ask if we may consider that an offer of marriage." King replied, "I am sorry if I have been so misunderstood. I thought we [the National Commission and the Board of Lady Managers] were already married." Board of Lady Managers Official Record.

several petitions for involvement in the construction, planning, and execution of the Fair, which had been ignored by the National Commission. Overt exclusion of Black men and women would continue throughout the Fair; few gained employment or representation on the fairgrounds.[337] Christopher Robert Reed outlines these struggles, and notes how the Commission's discrimination stimulated Black feminist organization. He writes, "at the point that African American men could not gain the fullest representation they sought for their race, the mantle of leadership in this matter of perceived racial entitlement voluntarily passed to the women."[338] Two women's groups led by Lettie Trent and R.D. Boone formed to fight Black men and women's exclusion, and sought the support of the Board of Lady Managers.

Trent's group, which at this time called themselves "The Colored Women of Chicago" but would eventually become the Woman's Columbian Association, had held a public meeting at Bethesda Baptist Church and come up with a set of resolutions to present to the Board of Lady Managers. Palmer responded by appointing a three-person committee to confer with Trent on the morning of November 25, 1890, which included liberal abolitionist Lady Managers Mary Logan, Helen Brayton of South Carolina, and Mary Cantrill of Kentucky.[339] That afternoon, Logan brought their resolutions before the rest of the Board:

> Mrs. [Mary] Logan: I shall ask to read a communication that has been sent to me, and which I have been asked to present to this Board. I only want to say that this communication comes from a meeting of the colored women of Chicago. They

[337] Dennis B. Downey, *A Season of Renewal: The Columbian Exposition and Victorian America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 27.
[338] Christopher Robert Reed, *"All the World is Here!": The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000), 25.
[339] Weimann, 103.

> have passed a resolution, asking that this resolution be introduced here and that the ladies have the kindness to see that it be referred to the Commission. I only want to say this, that I think we with all women, without regard to race or previous condition shall have a chance in this great Fair, and we must admit, whatever our prejudices are, that these people have done wonders since their freedom, and that they ought to be allowed to make an exhibition of their products.
> …
> The following communication was then read:
> WHEREAS, no provisions have, as yet, been made by the World's Columbian Exposition Commission for securing exhibits from the colored women of this country, or giving of representation to them in such Fair, and
> WHEREAS, under the present arrangement and classification it would be impossible for visitors to the Exposition to know and distinguish the exhibits and handiwork of the colored women from those of the Anglo-Saxon, and because of this, the honor, fame and credit for all meritorious exhibits, though made by some of our race, would not be duly given to us,
> *Therefore be it Resolved:* That for the purpose of demonstrating the progress of the colored women since emancipation and of showing to those who are yet doubters, and there are many, that the colored women have and are making rapid strides in art, science and manufacturing, and of furnishing to all information as to the educational and industrial advancement made by the race, and what the race has done, is doing and might do in every department of life, that we, the colored women of Chicago, request the World's Columbian Commission to establish an office for a colored woman whose duty it shall be to collect exhibits from the colored women of America, and arrange them according to the classification heretofore made. [sic] [340]

Unsurprisingly, these requests caused mixed reactions among the regionally diverse Lady Managers. Imagining "an office for a colored woman"[341] within the Board was too much for ladies from the Jim Crow South to imagine. When an Isabella member suggested that this office be filled by Lettie Trent, the *Chicago Times* reported a Southern lady's response: "We will speak to negroes and be kind to them as employees, but we will not sit with them."[342] Despite appeals from Isabella members like Couzins and

[340] Board of Lady Mangers Official Record, November 25, 1890.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Weimann, 104. Also, Barbara A. White, *The Beecher Sisters* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), 305.

Isabella Beecher Hooker for African American women's involvement, Palmer eventually decided to appease her Southern Lady Managers.[343] The following spring, rather than appoint a Black woman to the board, Palmer appointed Lady Manager Mary Cantrill to act as the Board's representative of the "colored people." Never mind that Cantrill was a white woman from Kentucky—she was Palmer's close friend and Palmer was still neck-deep in the Couzins scandal. Trent and liberal Lady Managers protested Palmer's actions, but Palmer quickly attributed her decision to the lack of unity and clear direction in the Black women's requests; ironic, given the ongoing conflicts among the Lady Managers.[344]

As to Trent's other requests, Mary Logan moved that products made in whole or in part by African American labor should be allocated a separate exhibit. A familiar debate followed. Some women, like Mrs. Beck of Florida, opposed a separate exhibit and believed submissions from African American women should be placed alongside other American-made products, and thus "make their exhibit on a perfect equality."[345] Eventually, Logan moved that decisions about whether and how African American products should be integrated into the Woman's Building be referred to the Executive Committee of the Columbian Exposition Commission.[346] The Lady Managers' unwillingness to decide on this issue, because of its perceived weight and controversy, was not unprecedented. They often felt a sense of unease at being asked to weigh in on

[343] Perhaps we can number President Palmer herself among the Southern ladies. She was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1849, after all. Though she moved to Chicago when she was only six, her family's Southern roots and connections may have influenced her decision.
[344] Reed, 29.
[345] Comment from Mrs. Beck of Florida, in Board of Lady Mangers Official Record, November 25, 1890.
[346] Weimann, 103.

major decisions about the Fair, even about their own building, and would often defer to the Commission's judgment.

Logan's motion to place the matter in the Commission's hands allowed time for Trent's rival group, the Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association led by Mrs. R.D. Boone, to also log requests with President Palmer. But by September of 1891, the Woman's Board simply concluded that Black women's work would be considered alongside the work of white women for inclusion in the Woman's Building exhibits,[347] but allowed for no Black representation on the Board.

Trent and Boone were outraged, and along with other newly founded clubs, made public the Woman's Board's discrimination. They traveled to Washington D.C. to present a circular, signed by Trent and famous elocutionist Hallie Brown, which stated:

> Shall the Negro Women of this country have a creditable display of their labor and skill at the World's Columbian Exposition? The Board of Lady Managers, created by an act of Congress, says no. . . Shall five millions of Negro women allow a small number of white women to ignore them in this the grandest opportunity to manifest their talent and ability in this, the greatest expression of the age? . . . Ought not the work of the Negroes. . . be placed in the hands of Negro women? It ought or else the work of all the bureaux of white women should be placed in the hands of colored women . . .[348]

In the face of a second round of public accusations, President Palmer asked all women delegates from Southern states to sign a pledge of goodwill to Black women and looked to appoint a "secretary of colored interests" to the Board. She offered the position first to Hallie Brown, who declined, before appointing Mrs. Curtis. But after only two

[347] Decision reported in the *Woman's Journal* (September 1891). Quoted in Weimann, 111.
[348] Weimann, 112.

months, Palmer requested Curtis's transfer to another office.[349] Palmer later appointed Fannie Barrier Williams to fill this role, for an unsalaried position helping with the installation of exhibits, but again, Williams's job ended in a transfer request.[350] Additionally, the Board of Lady Managers decided that State women's committees could appoint Black women and include Black women's work as part as their individual exhibits as they saw fit, but New York was the only state to do so.[351] J. Imogen Howard worked for the New York Women's Board in an unpaid position for two years.[352]

Because of the near complete exclusion of both workingwomen like Phoebe Couzins from the executive committee, and Black women from the Lady's Board as a whole, the Woman's Board and Building was primarily planned and organized by white affluent women.

**The Woman's Building**

Due to this exclusion, the Woman's Building was, in a sense, Palmer's and the Board's family parlor: their conceptions of white womanhood were bound within its walls. Though men also visited the Woman's Building, it was primarily a space *for women*,[353] complete with lush furnishings from around the country. Palmer, Belle of Kentucky and Queen of Chicago, played host. But Palmer's power over the displays did

[349] Reed, 30.
[350] Weimann, 120.
[351] White, 305.
[352] Weimann, 121.
[353] Practically demonstrated by the inclusion with five women's rooms and only one men's room (see figure 4.1).

not prevent a proliferation of views on modern womanhood from being exhibited and discussed within the building, as we will see.

The Woman's Building presented a bit of every industry separated by place of origin, but all created by women.[354] The exhibits advocated for women's traditional roles through displays of clothing, crafts, cooking, sanitation, and new home technologies like washing, pleating, and dishwashing machines.[355] The children's building, also planned and run by the Women's Board and located just adjacent to the Woman's Building, provided childcare facilities and promoted Kindergarten education. But the Women's Building's exhibits also supported women's activities outside of their traditional sphere, aiming to present a history of women's progress. Palmer, with the assistance of Sarah Hallowell, took organizational control of the Fine Arts Loan Exhibit, which featured works by accomplished women artists in the main lobby. Palmer was also particularly eager to showcase women engaged in "rare and interesting lines of work,"[356] like women doctors and women inventors. But the Inventions Room, organized by Mary Lockwood, mostly featured women's inventions that aided with domestic convenience.

Though African American women were mostly excluded, J. Imogen Howard's work with the New York Board culminated in a book of statistics about current Black women from all over the nation and an "Afro-American Exhibit" displayed in the Woman's Building.[357] Howard's exhibit was placed alongside works by Native

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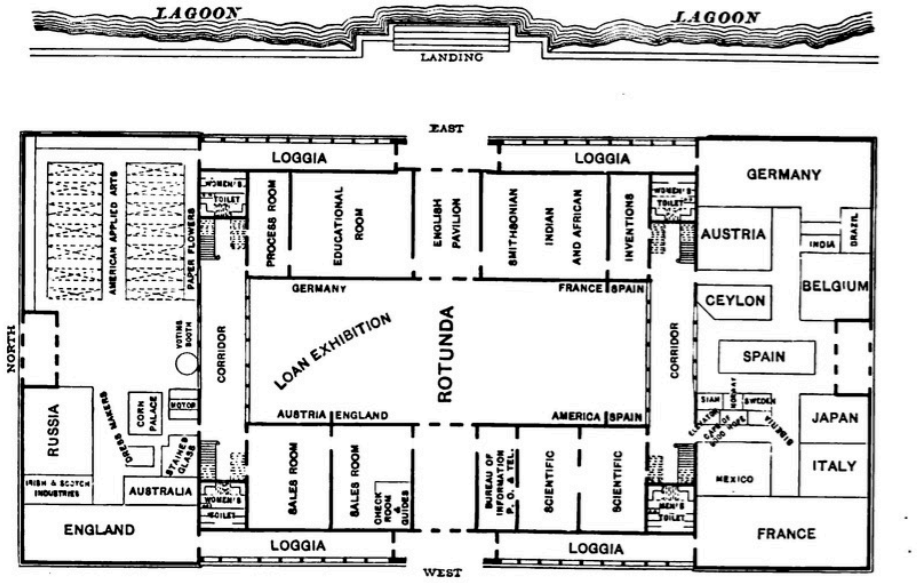
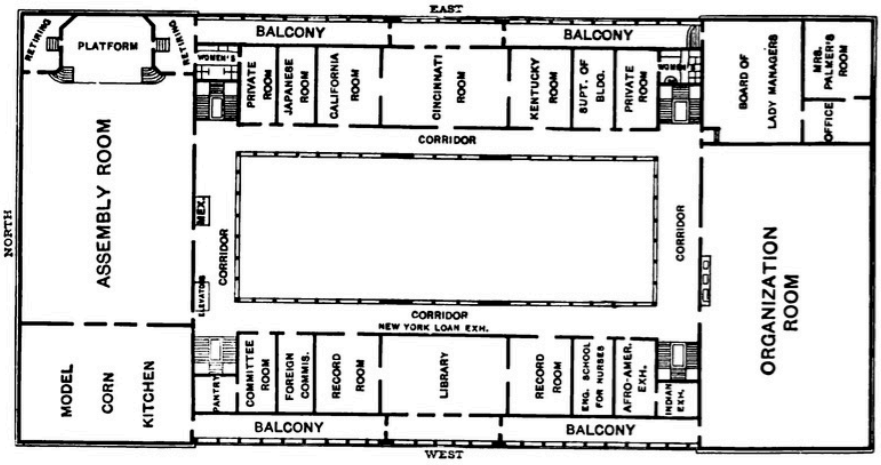
[354] President Bertha H. Palmer, *World's Columbian Exposition, Woman's Building, Official Catalogue of Events, Revised Edition* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893).
[355] Quoted in Andrews, 6.
[356] Quoted in Weimann, 427.
[357] Weimann, 122.

Americans, African products, and exhibits from countries around the globe, each contained within glass display cases or even individual rooms (see figure 4.1). This careful inclusion, for Palmer, simultaneously proved white women's equal capacity for modern art and "primitive" women's participation in the development of "earlier" art forms.

Palmer's personal vision of women's modernity, of which she was the personification, was most clearly displayed through her carefully curated art loan exhibition. This exhibition of women's art earned a central place in the Woman's Building, but was edged in closely by the "handicrafts" of other "primitive" women in the exhibits. Palmer allowed for the presence of racial Others in the Woman's Building, not in her art display, but on the periphery. Rather than have their work displayed on equal footing with that of white women, African Americans were included in order to reify the white/everyone else binary, simplifying whiteness into to its post-Civil War constructed unity. The international display captured a bit of exotic flair within the walls of the Woman's Building, but the real ethnographic revelry began just outside the Woman's Building's doors, in the Midway Plaisance, the carnivalesque entertainment strip at the Fair.




GROUND PLAN WOMAN'S BUILDING.




GALLERY PLAN WOMAN'S BUILDING.

Figure 4.1. Floor plan of the Woman's Building from *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building* (1893).

**The Woman's Building's Location at the Fair**

As Couzins and the other Isabellas feared, the Woman's Building separated women's activity from the rest of the Exposition. The location of the Woman's Building within the fairgrounds shows its relative lack of importance to the Chicago Corporation: on the west edge of the grounds, directly in front of the entrance to the Midway Plaisance, which boasted entertainments from all over the world, featuring a menagerie and Ethnological museum, beer gardens, camel rides, swimming pools, exotic dancers, the Ice Railway, and of course, the Ferris Wheel[358] (see figure 4.2).

Visitors noted the contrast between the festival of the Midway and the austerity of the Woman's Building. Novelist Clara Burnham describes entering the fairgrounds from the Midway: "The angels on the woman's building smile down and bless you, and you know that in what seemed like one step you've passed out o' darkness and into the light."[359] The various attractions of the Midway proved impossible for the Lady's Board to ignore; at one point Bertha Palmer demanded the closure of the Little Egypt attraction, whose popular belly dancers gave particular offense to the Lady Managers,[360] but in this dispute, she didn't get her way. But the Woman's Building was simultaneously rendered comparable to the carnivalesque attractions of the Midway by proximity; women were an Othered spectacle that the Fair management thought best to place at the Midway's entrance.

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[358] Weimann, 256.
[359] Clara Burnham, *Sweet Clover: A Romance of the White City* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1894). Quoted in Weimann, 257.
[360] Weimann, 257-58.

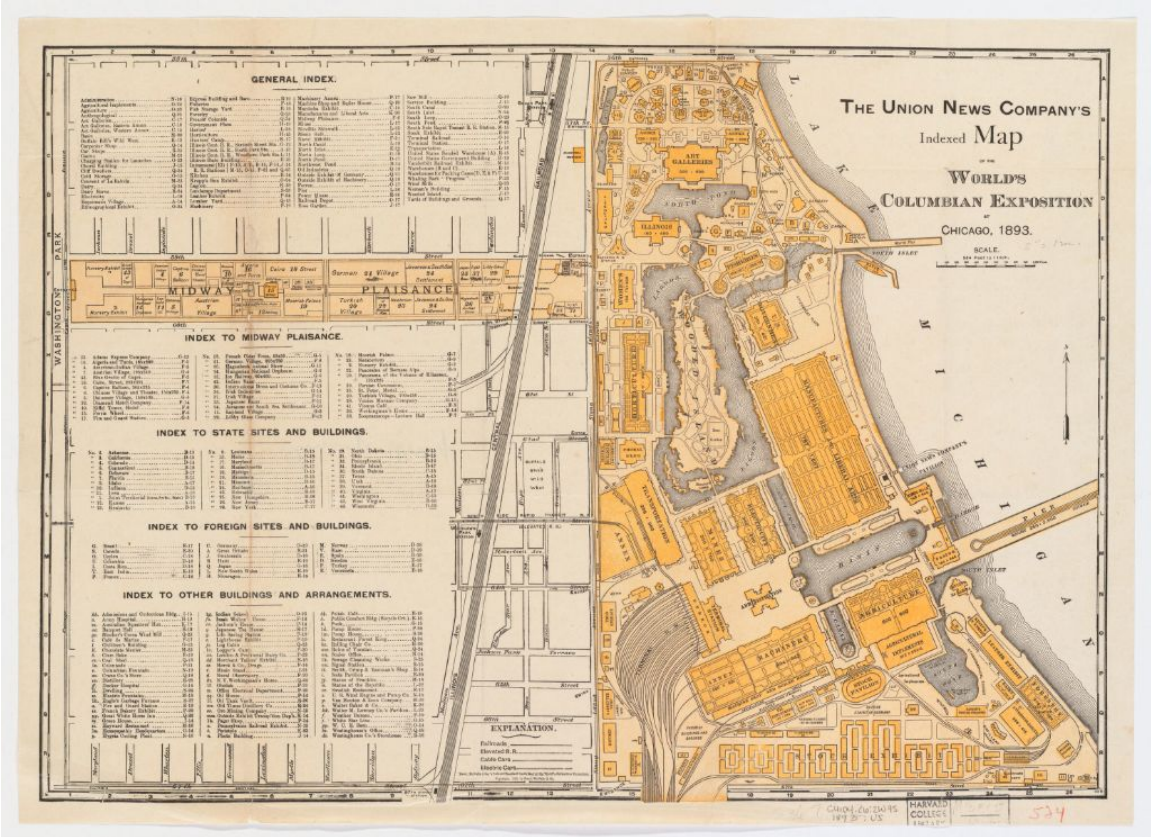

Figure 4.2. Indexed Map of the World's Columbian Exposition. The Union News Company, Chicago, 1893.

At the same time, the Woman's Building was included in the so-called "Court of Honor," on the fairgrounds. All of the other main buildings that were arranged in the Court of Honor were separated by types of industry: transportation, agriculture, fine art, etc. The location of the Woman's Building as part of the Court of Honor, then, suggests that "Woman" was a main feature of the modern display, like the newest technological innovations by Edison, Westinghouse, and Bell. Indeed, Truman's quote from *History of the Fair* quoted above depicts woman as a product of mankind. He said, "At no time in her history has she been accorded such a place as she now occupies as *an integral part of*

*a mammoth display of the achievements of mankind*."[361] Fair visitors would go to the technology building to see technology, the Fine Arts Building to see Fine Arts, and the Woman's Building to see woman. *She* is part of the display of mankind's achievements.

**The Modern Woman: Subject, Not Object**

The layout of the fairgrounds thus conflated woman with both object and spectacle. This is also evident in the Fair's art installations, statues, paintings, and architectural features. For instance, the use of the figure of woman as an allegory was ubiquitous at the Fair; indeed, woman-as-allegory earned a more prominent place than women-as-lady-managers ever could. Weimann notes that "Everywhere in the Fair 'women's forms divine' appeared: supporting roofs, ornamenting friezes, perching on domes."[362] The figure of woman was appropriated to stand for the hopes for the future of the nation.

This included the female angels atop the Woman's Building by Alice Rideout, which were clustered in two groups, symbolizing "The Three Virtues" ("Innocence," "Charity," and "Sacrifice") and "Enlightenment." And, at the east end of the basin opposite the Administration building, standing 65-feet tall, Daniel Chester French's *The Republic* (figure 4.3) was a female allegory no one could ignore; made of plaster, covered in gold leaf, lit with electric lights from the crown, and nicknamed "Big Mary," Chester's *Republic* was the largest sculpture yet in the U.S. Wearing classical flowing robes, she

[361] Truman, quoted in Corn, 65. Emphasis mine.
[362] Weimann, 263.

held an eagle perched on a globe in her right hand and a lance and Phrygian cap decorated with laurel leaves in her left. Downey notes that, like the *Statue of Liberty* of 1886, "the *Republic* represented maternal strength and domestic stability… the two feminine images encouraged national confidence and self-assurance."[363] But by looking west instead of east, *Republic* showed the national emphasis on Western expansion as the basis of the next century's progress.[364]

Figure 4.3. Daniel Chester French, *The Republic* at the World's Columbian Exposition, 1893. Photo featured in *The Chicago Tribune*.[365]

[363] Downey, *xviii.*
[364] Downey, *xviii*.
[365] "World's Columbian Exposition in 1893," *Monovisions: Black & White Photography Magazine,* http://monovisions.com/worlds-columbian-exposition-in-1893/ (accessed December 25, 2015).

Some Lady Managers were aware of the Fair's tendency to present woman as object. This is evident in Bertha Palmer's opening address at the Woman's Building, where she decries men who say women should be kept on a pedestal:

> Would you have a woman step down from her pedestal in order to enter practical life?' Yes! A thousand times, yes! If we can really find after a careful search, any women mounted on pedestals, we should willingly ask them to step down in order that they may meet and help to uplift their sisters...[366]

In a letter to Sarah Hallowell, Mary Cassatt described Palmer's superb "organizing powers and her determination that women should be *someone* and not *something*."[367] And Mrs. Effie Pitblado of Scotland delivered a speech at the Congress of Representative Women in May 1893 entitled "Not Things, But Women." She said,

> Things are great. They are either the thought of God or man. Natural things are the thoughts of God; artificial things are the thoughts of man. But woman is greater than things, because she is the breath of God, or soul. Things are matter; woman is spirit. So she, with man, has dominion over things.[368]

The Lady Managers took advantage of their newly allotted power in the Fair's planning and employed the womanly ideal of health and activity in an attempt to overturn their objectification. Bertha Palmer's negotiation of her own difficult position within the patriarchal Fair management with its limiting gendered expectations demonstrates a successful balance of feminine virtue and power.

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[366] Bertha Honoré Palmer, Speech at Opening Day, May 1, 1893. Quoted in Weimann, 253.
[367] Sarah Hallowell to Bertha Palmer, Feb. 189[2?], quoting letter from Mary Cassatt, Bertha Honoré Palmer Correspondence Collection, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.
[368] Effie Pitblado, "Not Things, But Women," in *The Congress of Women, Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Official Edition* (Published by Direction of the Board of Lady Managers, 1893): 793-796.

**Bertha Palmer, Negotiating Power within a Patriarchy**

Not only was the Lady's Board aware of the tendency for men to conflate woman and object, they were also aware of how gendered expectations and prejudice limited their degree of choice in the Fair's planning. The Board's choices were bound by the Fair Commission and Corporation, and by the thousands of male spectators that would pass through the doors of the Woman's Building on a daily basis. Interior designer Candace Wheeler described the Woman's Building as "the most peaceably human of all the buildings . . . like a man's ideal of woman—delicate, dignified, pure, and Fair to look upon."[369] While recognizing the degree to which the male-controlled Commission constrained the Board's choices, and how contemporary norms influenced its construction of the modern woman, it's important to also understand how women like Bertha Palmer gained and maintained power while under such constraints.

To maintain her control of the woman's exhibits, Palmer had to walk a fine line between making her own choices and pleasing the Columbian Commission, between creating an image of her ideal modern woman and performing the role of an ideal woman the Commission would trust. She did this through Gilded Age politeness and womanly compassion, her highly visible position as a wife and mother, and, I argue, through molding herself into a model of womanly beauty through fashion. She balanced the risk of becoming masculinized by power and public action through her loyalty to her husband and children, her unwillingness to take unnecessary risk, and through the construction of

[369] Candace Wheeler, quoted in Sara Wadsworth and Wayne A. Wiegand, *Right Here I See My Own Books: The Woman's Building Library at the World's Columbian Exposition* (Amherst; Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 18.

her body through corseted constraint and fashion. Indeed, Palmer was notorious for her appearance. Her beauty was an essential part of her public persona. Society pages frequently reported her fashion choices[370] that set the pace for American trends. Even Pitblado in her speech, "Not Things, But Women," said, "What a fine looking body of women the Board of Lady Managers are, with their attractive and gracious president."[371]

The focus on Palmer's appearance, though objectifying, did not undermine her position. On the contrary, contemporaries understood beauty as a means for women to access power. In her speech at the Woman's Congress, Mrs. Wesley Smith of Chicago noted, "The perfect woman shall… remember that she owes an equal allegiance to every part of her being… She who aids not beauty by all reasonable means has lost one of the strongest levers by which to move the world."[372] Thus the emphasis on Palmer's beauty and fashion in part served to justify and naturalize the amount of power she wielded in the public realm.

This power, in turn, made her fashion choices that much more influential, serving to reify gendered norms. The Chicago History Museum's Online Catalogue for Palmer's dresses notes that in 1892, the *Ladies Home Journal* predicted that, "Everything this season must be trimmed with lace, ribbon, and jet to give it the desired stylish air...every tint of green, from light Nile to the moss shade, is fancied in Paris."[373] Palmer

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[370] Black, *ii.*
[371] Pitblado, 794.
[372] Mrs. Wesley Smith, "Symmetrical Womanhood," in *The Congress of Women*, 218.
[373] Quoted in the Costume and Textile Digital Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, Chicago, IL, under "Curatorial Statement," http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16029coll3/id/877/rec/6. (accessed December 22, 2015)

commissioned a dress from Robina, Paris the same year that perfectly fit (and perhaps set) this trend (figure 4.4).[374] Though she ordered gowns from the best designers in the U.S., England, and France, she preferred French designers. The Chicago collection notes "Through Parisian haute couture, Bertha Palmer had access to the best dressmakers and textile manufacturers in the world. She also had the ability to control specific details related to the fabric selection and construction of each item specific to her needs."[375] Being able to afford the best designers meant a greater degree of artistic control over her gowns, and subsequently, the gowns of the ladies she led. Fashion was a clear manifestation of her social power, one that middle-class women emulated through access to material goods advertised and sold at the Fair.

[374] Robina, Paris 1893, Dress, Ribbed silk, silk satin, silk crepe, jet beading. Permanent loan from the Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mrs. Potter Palmer II, Costume and Textile Digital Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16029coll3/id/877/rec/6 (accessed December 22, 2015).
[375] Costume and Textile Digital Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, under "Curatorial Statement," http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16029coll3/id/887 (accessed December 22, 2015)

Figure 4.4. Palmer's Dress from Robina, Paris 1893: Ribbed silk, silk satin, silk crepe, and jet beading.[376]

Palmer also used fashion to maintain her political power. At the opening ceremonies of the Exposition, when she boldly and plainly stated that government's recent discovery of women was the biggest achievement in the history of the nation, Palmer wore a dress "shot with gold thread and trimmed with jet and ostrich feathers."[377] Two days before, she had attended the Fair Dedication Ball, dressed in custom couture of gold velvet, topped with a diamond tiara.[378] Yet another evening dress Palmer

[376] Robina, Paris 1893, Dress, Ribbed silk, silk satin, silk crepe, jet beading. Permanent loan from the Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mrs. Potter Palmer II, Costume and Textile Digital Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16029coll3/id/877/rec/6 (accessed December 22, 2015).
[377] Weimann, 247.
[378] Weimann, 220.

commissioned for the Fair was completely golden, but this time made of silk satin with silk flowers, beads, rhinestones, cording, and a long embroidered train, designed by Charles Frédérick Worth's firm, House of Worth,[379] the most celebrated designer of the time (figure 4.5). She was photographed in this gown, again wearing a crown and her famous set of pearls (figure 4.6). Palmer once again chose to be regally attired for her official portrait commissioned by the Board of Lady Managers from Swedish artist Anders Zorn (figure 4.7). Elegantly dressed, with a wide stylish neckline, large sleeves, gloves, and long train, Palmer was depicted standing in the morning room of the Palmer House, her own castle on Lake Shore Drive.[380] The gavel in her right hand credits her years of labor leading the Board, and alludes to her sense of fairness and justice. Zorn solidifies Palmer's ascendance to royal status in style, and by adorning her with yet another crown. As Lady Manager Mary Eagle unveiled the portrait at the final meeting of the Board on October 31, she stated, "This day of sorrow we would turn to joy, and make it our coronation day. If we cannot crown our Queen, we will present to you our Queen already crowned."[381]

[379] Charles Frédérick Worth, House of Worth, Paris, Evening dress, 1893, Gift of the Art Institute of Chicago. 1960, Costume and Textile Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, Chicago, IL, under "Physical Description,"
http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16029coll3/id/425/rec/7
[380] Smith, 1.
[381] Weimann, 580.


Figures 4.5 and 4.6. Left: Charles Frédérick Worth, House of Worth, Paris, Evening dress, 1893. Right: Bertha Honoré Palmer, 1893, Stein and Rösch Fotografers.[382]

[382] Mrs. Potter Palmer, still image by Stein and Rösch Fotografers, Art and Picture Collection, The New York Public Library Digital Collections, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-eac3-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99 (accessed December 26, 2015).

Figure 4.7. Anders Zorn, *Mrs. Potter Palmer*, 1893.[383]

More than just conforming to fashion, Palmer's choice to wear golden gowns and tiaras not only solidified her Queenly reign over the Ladies' Board and Chicago society, but also alluded to the central allegory of the Fair as a whole, French's *The Republic* (figure 4.3). I can imagine her, clad in gold, serving her official duties in the Court of Honor. Viewers would not be able to avoid noting the similarities between her gilded queenly form and the statue over her shoulder. Despite her aversion to the idea of women

[383] Featured in "A Celebration of Women Writers," University of Pennsylvania Digital Collection, http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/eagle/congress/portrait.html (accessed December 26, 2015).

on pedestals, she made herself into the personification of the values of the World's Fair, a flesh-and-blood version of *The Republic*, crowned, clad in gold, and looking to the West.

Palmer used fashion as a device of cunning political maneuvering. Rather than breaching feminine fashion norms, she was able to use those norms to enhance her own power. She took on man's idea of Woman and man's idea of the Nation, while acting on the behalf of womankind in her own way. She became the central allegory of the Fair, and rather than stepping off the pedestal, she used it as a platform. Her reappropriation of men's female allegory for her own empowerment is a feminist move that links Palmer to more radical feminist circles, as we'll see.

**Expectations of the Corseted Body: Palmer & Amy Beach**

Palmer's personification of modern womanhood, as I argued in chapter one, had a material impact on her own body, and that material impact had ramifications for the material realities of the women she influenced. Flying in the face of contemporary dress reform, Palmer's gowns were the height of impracticality, with corsets, bustles, and endless layers of long skirts and sometimes even trains. After Palmer's death in 1918, Mrs. Carter H. Harrison described Palmer as having "the smallest waist in Chicago" and being of unusual beauty:

> Her hair was heavy and lustrous; and possessed the natural wave so dear to the feminine heart. Her white throat and shoulders were models of grace and her slender figure made her a joy to look upon... Mrs. Palmer was really a radiant being. I believe that no one who ever saw her will dispute this assertion. She was the embodiment of feminine loveliness.[384]

[384] Quoted in Smith, 4. Manuscript 39, Box 2, Folder 10, Sarasota History Center, Rollins Coakley Collection, Sarasota, FL.

The Chicago Historical Museum notes the dimensions of Palmer's gowns, which reflect the degree to which Palmer laced down to fit into them. While contemporary physicians noted an uncorseted waist should measure, on average, twenty-eight inches, Palmer's gowns reveal that she was corseted to twenty inches. With Palmer's bustle and fabric creating a hip measurement of forty-four inches, her waist-to-hip ratio in various dresses worn from 1892-1910 ranged from 0.45 to 0.65.[385] In other words, her waist ranged from less than half the size to 65% of her well-trussed hips. Palmer's corseting and fashion choices demonstrate her simultaneous conformity to gender norms, and her choices within those constraints. Her waist was, undoubtedly, *not* the smallest in Chicago. However, Harrison's claim shows how tightly bound together in contemporary thought were ideal womanhood, class, beauty, waist size, and perhaps now, power and agency.

Unfortunately, the fact that Palmer was a woman, and corseted, at times constrained her involvement with official Fair leadership duties. This shows that while her material presence helped to solidify her right to lead, it also reinforced gendered expectations of her abilities. For instance, when she was asked to speak to the huge crowd that would gather at Dedication Day in October 1892, Palmer was hesitant to accept the honor, because she "knew her voice would not carry."[386] The male speakers did not voice similar concerns, even though, with 140,000 people crammed into the

[385] Costume and Textile Digital Collection, Chicago Historical Museum, Chicago, IL. http://digitalcollection.chicagohistory.org/cdm/search/collection/p16029coll3/field/classi/searchterm/costume%20(mode%20of%20fashion)/mode/exact
[386] Block, 81.

Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building for the ceremony, they could not have possibly projected to the entire crowd, but perhaps only to the first few thousand people.[387]

The concern for volume transferred to gender-discriminatory decisions about music for the Dedication Ceremony. Concern for volume was the alleged reason choral conductor William L. Tomlins changed his mind and removed Amy Beach's *Festival Jubilate* from the program, because he said it would be "a mere chirp" while works by John Knowles Paine and George Chadwick would be better suited.[388] This, despite the fact that Amy Beach had scored the work for over 5,000 voices,[389] the same forces used to perform Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus at the same ceremony.[390] In addition, critics found her *Jubilate* similar enough to Chadwick's *Columbian Ode* (composed for and performed on Dedication Day), that Beach was accused of using her male colleague as a model. This could not have been the case, since, as Block notes, Beach finished her *Jubilate* two months before Chadwick completed his *Ode.*[391] Tomlins also critiqued Beach as being "very good, [but] . . . of ordinary merit compared to men" and critiqued the *Jubilate* for lacking "majesty and breadth" and being "too elaborate."[392]

Given this evidence, I believe that Tomlins's concern about the piece's volume, like his opinion of Beach's capabilities and the piece's quality, reveals more gender discrimination than fact or practicality. Amy Beach, like most other women of her race

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[387] Erik Larson, *Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 182.
[388] Block, 80.
[389] Block, 80.
[390] Larson, 181.
[391] Block, 82
[392] Block, 80.

and class, was corseted from an early age (see figures 4.8 and 4.9). Tomlins, who conducted numerous singers both male and female on a daily basis, could not separate the volume or quality of Beach's piece from her material presence, and thus expected her piece wouldn't resonate: that it would be corseted and that it would be constrained.

Figures 4.8 and 4.9. *Left:* Amy Cheney, 2x4 b&w print by Thors, Larkin Street, San Francisco, n.d. *Right:* Amy Beach with Dr. H.H.A. Beach, August 12, 1886. B&w, 8×10 print, Photographer unknown.[393]

[393] Both images from Amy Cheney Beach (Mrs. H.H.A. Beach) Papers, 1835-1956, MC 51, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH, USA. Made available digitally through the UNH Library Amy Cheney Beach Flickr collection: https://www.flickr.com/photos/unhlibrary/albums/72157650163621065/with/15597014853/, (accessed December 10, 2015).

**The World's Congress of Representative Women**

> *"The outlook is certainly good for our cause. It will be lifted on a whole age by this effort in a new situation. The women themselves will learn so much . . . . Everything seems to be helping now… How good it is, after these long years of struggle."*
>
> -Lucy Stone to Susan B. Anthony, Spring 1893

Despite their marginalization within the fairgrounds, their unsure footing under the patriarchal structure of the Fair, and their own disagreements over modern womanhood, radical Lady Managers managed to win a platform during the Fair and contributed significantly to ongoing discussions of women's rights. The issues were discussed regularly in meetings in the Woman's Building Assembly Room, but were highlighted at the "World's Congress of Representative Women," a week-long event which began May 15, 1893 and featured simultaneous sessions at the Woman's Building and the Memorial Arts Building on Michigan Avenue. It was estimated that 150,000 people attended the Women's Congress.[394]

Palmer invited women's clubs and women representatives from various nations to aid in the planning of the Women's Congress; over 500 women were part of the Advisory Council. Downey notes the stronger presence of women's rights activists on the Council, including Lucy Stone, Clara Barton, Frances Willard, Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, Julia Ward Howe, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Speeches by these more radical activists and famous suffragists, especially Stone, were among the best-attended events of the

[394] May Wright Sewall, "Introduction," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women,* edited by May Wright Sewall (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), 6. Quoted by Downey, 115 and Ashley Geer, "The 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition and the Emergence of the Women's Music Club Movement" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 2011), 20.

entire Fair. Susan B. Anthony believed the Congress would "advance woman's cause 100 years."[395] But the speeches by "Militant Women" were balanced with input by "Womanly Women," who focused their talks on issues related what they deemed to be woman's primary function: to keep house and care for their children. Indeed, though it was planned by a separate, even larger organizational body, the Congress was the ideological twin of the material displays in the Woman's building, revealing tensions between the two sides of the late-nineteenth-century women's rights movement.

Out of the 188 speeches that were printed in a commemorative publication after the Fair, twenty-five (thirteen percent of) speakers discussed women's rights, of which eight (four percent) dealt specifically with the difficulties facing working-class women, Palmer's pet philanthropic project (see charts, figures 4.10 and 4.11). These numbers don't include separate afternoon sessions, like the one organized by the National American Woman's Suffrage Association on May 18 to specifically address women's right to vote.

[395] Anthony quoted in *Daily Columbian*, May 15, 1893. Quoted in Downey, 115.

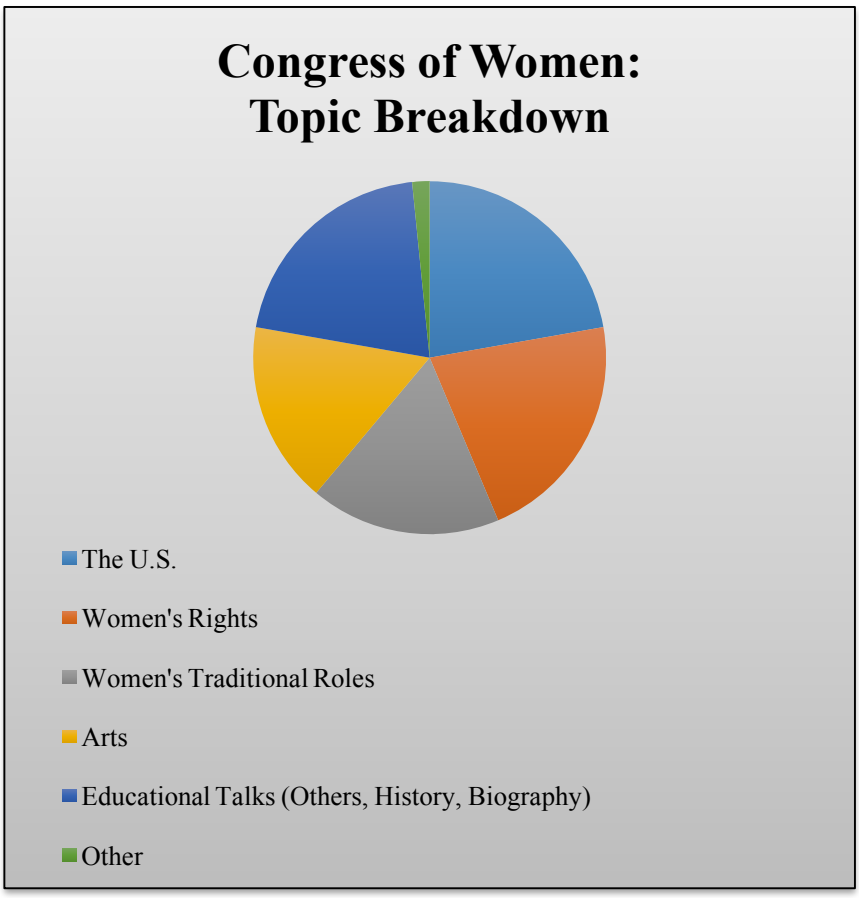


Figure 4.10. Congress of Representative Women, Published Talks Breakdown by Broad Topic Categories.

| Topic Category | Number of Talks |
|---|---|
| Women's Rights | 25 |
| Education | 10 |
| Working Women | 8 |
| Women in Specific Professions | 7 |
| Dress Reform | 2 |
| Ideal Womanhood | 16 |
| Homemaking; the Domestic Sphere | 10 |
| Philanthropy/Missionary Work | 6 |
| Healthy, Balanced Living | 5 |
| Cooking | 3 |
| Misc. Domestic Hobbies | 3 |
| Literature | 16 |
| Visual Art | 13 |
| Music | 6 |
| Elocution, Theatre | 4 |
| Our Nation, U.S. Nationalism | 12 |
| Modern Society, Progress | 11 |
| The South | 11 |
| Specific States | 7 |
| Religion | 5 |
| Western Expansion | 4 |
| Chicago | 3 |
| Exotic Locale/People | 29 |
| Historical Talks | 13 |
| Biography | 7 |
| Peace, Arbitration | 2 |
| Agriculture | 2 |
| Clubs | 1 |
| "Culture" Broadly | 1 |
| Ethics | 1 |
| Cholera | 1 |

Figure 4.11. Congress of Representative Women, Published Talks Breakdown by Narrow Topic Categories.

**Health, the Body, the Corset, and Music at Women's Congresses**

Many speakers at the Women's Congress focused on ways to live a healthy and balanced life. These speeches reveal ways in which women thought about their bodies at the end of the century, and, most relevant here, how they thought about their bodies in relation to corseting and music. Mrs. Wesley Smith of Chicago said,

> Mother Nature loves a trinity; her handiwork material and immaterial, is largely made up of threefold creations…With a threefold nature [men and women] have been endowed, mental, moral, and physical; intellectual, spiritual and corporeal; a mind, a body, and a soul… How shall our trinity be beautiful, or our triangle perfect, unless each of these sides be symmetrically developed?[396]

Miss Ida K. Hinds from New York added that in order for the body, soul, and mind to be balanced, "the body should receive the first attention. It is the foundation on which we must build…and decorate with soul and mind, our temple."[397] Mrs. Smith, Miss Hinds, and many other speakers believed exercise essential to ideal womanhood, reflecting the ideal strong, modern woman and the increased activity of women like the Lady Managers.

The concern for physical health bolstered radical discussions by advocates of dress reform, discussions that received much public attention.[398] Dress reformers at the end of the century had very similar goals to the antebellum reformers discussed in chapter three. They sought to convince women to discard several features of modern fashion they though impractical, unhealthy, or downright dangerous: corsets, bustles, and long skirts that restricted movement and picked up harmful germs and moisture. Dress reformers

[396] Mrs. Wesley Smith, "Symmetrical Womanhood," in *The Congress of Women*, 217.
[397] Ida K. Hinds, "Harmonious Culture," in *The Congress of Women*, 439.
[398] Weimann, 532.

thought this issue was especially crucial for women at the World's Fair, whose heightened activity and exposure made modern fashion even more risky. A March 1893 article in the *Bazar* called "Dress for the Columbian Exposition. What shall I Wear?" outlined the 1890s reformer's dream: "A travelling dress by all means . . . a smart gown of light weight wool very simply made, with the skirt clearing the ground all around by one inch."[399] Most women did not follow these guidelines, especially not the fashionable Lady Managers led by Palmer. Perhaps that contributed to the fainting spells and over-exhaustion treated at the Fair's hospital: Larson counted 594 cases.[400]

Regardless, at the Women's Congress, Elizabeth Krecher, Ellen Hayes, Minna Gordon Gould, and Annie Jenness Miller individually took the stage, looked down into the faces of the powerful Bertha Palmer, corseted to twenty inches, and hundreds of other rich, powerful, and elegantly and impractically-dressed women, to bravely say things like:

> While women are afraid of ridicule for being odd, and are slaves to fashion, no amount of argument from an aesthetic or even hygienic standpoint will affect them. In vain you may tell them that beauty and fashion are not synonymous… that some of the most celebrated artists of today will not paint a woman's portrait until she has removed "those disfigurements," as they designate corsets, etc. That the most noted house in London will not make a gown fashioned upon the abnormal, inartistic lines of the corset; that hundreds of the most intelligent women in this country and in England are striving for something better for themselves and their children in the way of healthful and artistic clothing… These arguments seem to fall for the most part on 'stony ground,' and the 'thus saith' of fashion is as potent as ever with a large majority, even though obedience to her commands entails agony and deformity. (Minna Gordon Gould)[401]

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[399] Quoted in Weimann, 533.
[400] Larson, 284.
[401] Minna Gordon Gould, "Harmonious Adjustment through Exercise," in *The Congress of Women,* 661-662.

And,

> It can not [sic] be doubted that [woman's] present mode of dressing is a large retarding force in the civilization and progress of the whole race. (Ellen Hayes)[402]

Part of the reason for earlier dress reformer's limited success, it was thought, was the unattractive fashions they had offered as alternatives. By the 1890s, even radical reformers like Lucy Stone had abandoned the Bloomer Costume as an alternative too ugly and conspicuous to catch on.[403] Annie Jenness Miller believed all the dress reform movement needed was more "picturesque and pleasing effects"[404] (see Miller's portrait in her version of rational dress, figure 4.12). Even with attempts at more aesthetically pleasing alternatives, dress reform didn't gain widespread success until the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

Back in the Inventions Room at the Women's Building, an alternative to the restrictive corset was on display: Olivia P. Flynt's "True Corset" or "Flynt Waist." Flynt had revealed the corset at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, and it was again a highlight in 1893. Flynt won awards at both fairs. She described her invention as:

> A scientific garment which proves more than a substitute for other corsets…While the Waist permits natural circulation, perfect respiration, and freedom for every muscle, it imparts an artistic contour and elegance of motion, that all corsets utterly destroy.[405]

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[402] Ellen Hayes, "Woman's Dress from the Standpoint of Sociology," quoted in Downey, 122.
[403] Weimann, 535-6. Lucy Stone discussed the bloomer at the Congress as "the lightest, easiest, and cleanest dress I have ever worn. I adopted it when I was young and perhaps a trifle ignorant. I was disgusted with prevalent dress and I said, 'When women see a sensible gown, they'll adopt it.' They didn't adopt it, but I had a good time with it for a little while…But… it was so conspicuous. The torment to the spirit was greater than the ease to the body, I found. So I gave it up."
[404] Mrs. Jenness Miller, "Dress Improvement," in *The Congress of Women,* 695.
[405] Weimann, 431.

Figure 4.12. Annie Jenness Miller in what she considered a smart and aesthetically-pleasing alternative to modern fashions. Portrait included in *The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition* (1893).

Though Flynt's business was bolstered through exhibiting at the fairs, she also faced stiff competition from exhibits within the Woman's Building and in Manufactures Hall, which reflected the ideological conflict between the dress reformers and ladies of high fashion. In the Woman's Building, dress and corset-makers submitted samples for the displays of "women's work" by nation. Of all the national exhibits summarized in the retrospective "Art and Handicraft at the Woman's Building," only Madame Pegard's summary of the French exhibit mentions a corset maker, Madame Bureau-Bigot. The Belgium and German summaries mention particularly notable lace dresses, but not corsets. In exhibiting corsets, it seems that large corset manufacturers preferred to exhibit in the giant Manufactures Building, rather than in the Woman's Building, perhaps

wishing to associate themselves with masculine industrial progress rather than women's art and products.[406]

Indeed, the Manufactures Building held elaborate exhibits by corset companies from around the world: France, Belgium, Brazil, Mexico, and the U.S. The U.S. corset companies came out in full force: Madame Newman Corset Company from Chicago, Van Orden Corset Company and Delsarte Corset Company from New York, Coronet Corset Company from Jackson, Michigan, and a large exhibit showing one hundred different styles by the Worcester Corset Company from Worcester, Massachusetts. Hannah Freud, who acted as judge for the corsets and dress-cutting exhibits, noted that,

> The exhibits of the United States manufacturers were equal to the best of the foreign makes…[the U.S. corset industry] has had a wonderful impetus in the past few years, which improved machinery, which has greatly lessened the cost of production… There is no doubt it will not be many years before the United States will not only lead in the quantity, but also in quality and beauty of shapes. No nation can furnish more symmetrical and beautiful human models than can be had in the United States.[407]

Freud seems anxious to prove, along with all U.S. manufacturers, and, in fact, along with U.S. architects, artists, and musicians at the Fair, that the U.S. was at least equal to, and independent from, foreign imports. Freud's belief in the inevitably of the American dominance of the corset industry was based on her assumption that the U.S.

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[406] Though I'm not sure how much the absence of corsets in the summaries of Woman's Building exhibits reflects an actual absence or choice by the writers, the absence is still telling. It shows that corsets were considered more modern industrial product than womanly accouterment; it could also suggest that the main manufacturers of corsetry were male and thus unable to present at the Woman's Building.

[407] Hannah Freud, "Corsets and Dress-Cutting Systems, Etc." in *World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, III, 1893, World's Columbian Commission, Committee on Awards* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), 203.

manufactured the most beautiful wax model women, and though she doesn't come right out and say it, the most beautiful *real* women.

Freud's report on the Worcester Corset Company was particularly flattering. She said the company had

> one of the most attractive exhibits. Each corset was on a life-size beautiful wax model, and the corsets were attractively made. This is one of the pioneer corset factories in the United States. Its president, D.F. Fanning, was the founder, who established it in 1861, with one sewing machine. They were incorporated in 1888 and now employ over 700 intelligent operators. Their products are sold in all the leading cities of the United States.[408]

The Worcester Company distributed free color souvenir pamphlets to visitors at its Fair exhibit (excerpts shown in figures 4.13-4.14).[409] The pamphlet boasts:

> Chief among the excellencies of these Corsets are their PERFECT SHAPES, always reliable; their LIGHTNESS OF WEIGHT and great FLEXIBILITY, always comfortable; their DURABILITY, always economical;—Style, Comfort, Economy;—these are the points that commend them to the ladies.[410]

The pamphlet shows that Worcester had jumped on the bandwagon of the "healthy" corsets fad to combat dress reformers' criticisms, but only in their marketing strategies. Unlike Flynt's alternative, Worcester's corsets were heavily boned, and the company was beginning to manufacture corsets with the "S-curve" so common at the turn of the century. The "S-curve" featured a straight front that pushed the lower abdomen in and the chest forward, creating the figure of an "S" from the side (see figure 4.15). This arched the back in a way potentially damaging to the spine.[411] Scholars have often seen the fad

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[408] Freud, 205.
[409] Worchester Company Pamphlet available online through Alexia MacClain, "'Comfortable Corsets' circa 1893," *Unbound* (Smithsonian Libraries blog), entry posted October 17, 2012, https://blog.library.si.edu/2012/10/ comfortable-corsets-circa-1893/ (accessed December 13, 2015).
[410] Worchester Company Pamphlet.
[411] Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 84.

for advertising "healthy" corsets as a response to concerns about the corset's damaging effects. But the Worcester pamphlet's allusion to health benefits could be read as a parody of the reformers' arguments rather than a simple marketing ploy.


Figure 4.13. Royal Worcester Corset Company Pamphlet for the 1893 Columbian Exposition.

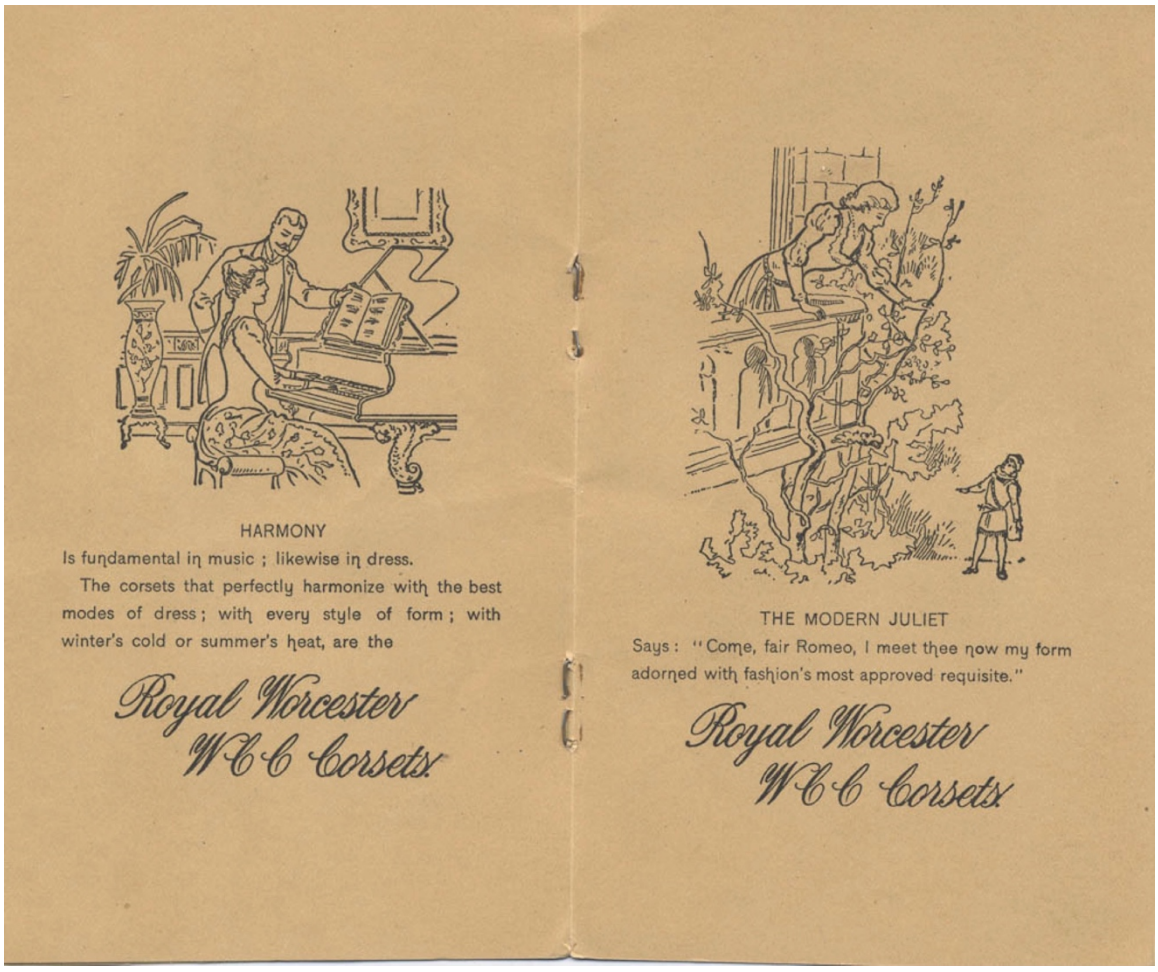


Figure 4.14. Royal Worcester Corset Company Pamphlet for the 1893 Columbian Exposition.

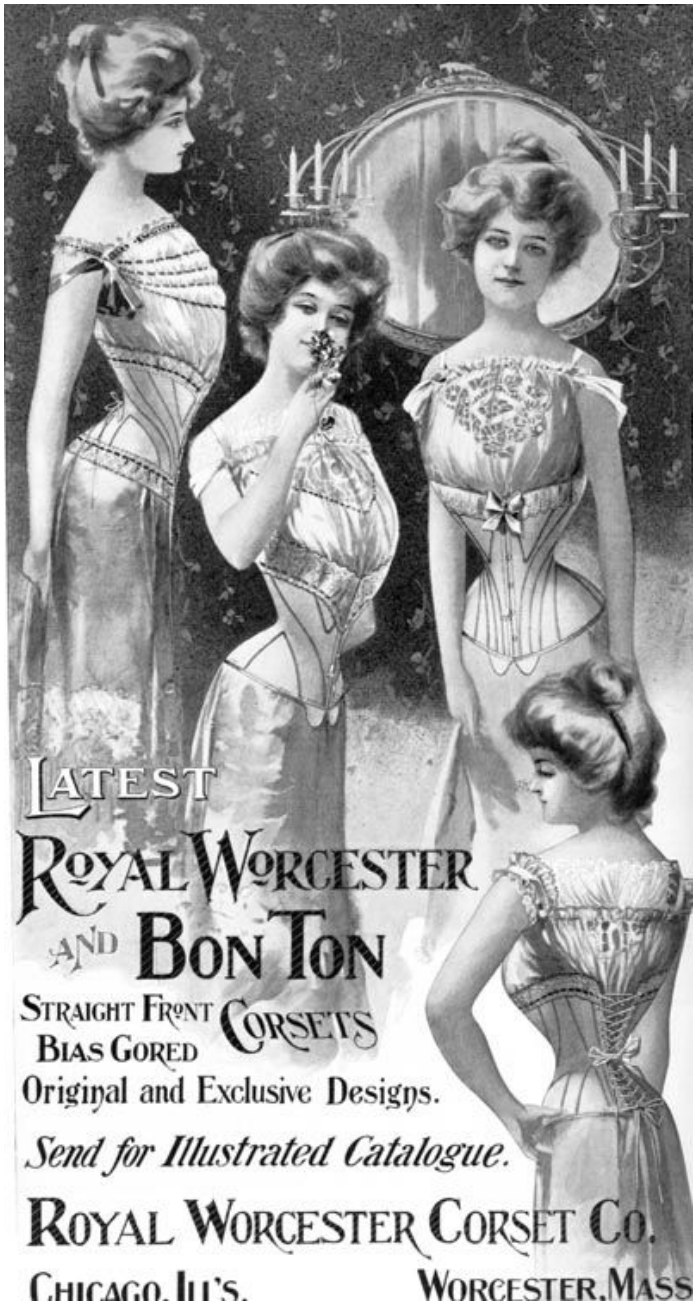


Figure 4.15. Royal Worcester Corset advertisement featuring their S-bend corsets, *Ladies Home Journal* (May 1901).

For instance, the pamphlet's sketched models are glassy-eyed and armless (see figure 4.13). This would undoubtedly call to mind the Venus de Milo, which dress reformers since mid-century had employed as their strongest argument in favor of the beauty of classic "natural," uncorseted bodies.[412] Perhaps it also called to mind one of the most popular curiosities at the Fair: a 1,500 pound chocolate Venus de Milo in the Hall of Agriculture. Through the pamphlet's allusions to the Venus de Milo, the Worcester Company may have intended to increase their corsets' association with beauty and healthfulness, but I believe that they also aimed to share a laugh at the expense of the dress reform movement with more savvy customers.[413]

The parodic nature is more overt in sketches in the middle of the pamphlet (shown in figure 4.14). Here, Worcester corsets are shown on women in action, not just on their armless torsos. The sketches suggest what type of woman wears Worcester corsets, or perhaps, what kind of woman you *could be* if you bought a Worcester corset. On the left, a woman plays the piano as a man affectionately gazes down at her after turning the page of her sheet music. The caption reads:

> HARMONY is fundamental in music; likewise in dress. The corsets that perfectly harmonize with the best modes of dress; with every style of form; with winter's cold or summer's heat, are the Royal Worcester WCC Corsets.[414]

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[412] See chapter 3 for comparisons to Venus de Milo as a major feature in Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's arguments against corseting in Merrifield, *Dress as a Fine Art* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1854). Also discussed in Caroline Palmer, "Colour, Chemistry and Corsets: Mary Philadelphia Merrifield's *Dress as a Fine Art,*" *Costume* 47, no. 1 (2013): 3-27.

[413] Perhaps the chocolate Venus de Milo sought to ridicule the increased attention from dress reformers on the statue as well, though this is less evident.

[414] Worchester Company Pamphlet.

No note of satire arises from this sketch, since we know that it was common for women to perform music in precisely this way. Yet the sketch opposite this one satirizes the necessity of the latest fashions for love in modern times. A "Modern Juliet," with Elizabethan sleeves but a modern silhouette, gestures down from her balcony at her completely Elizabethan Romeo. The caption for this sketch reads:

> THE MODERN JULIET Says: "Come, fair Romeo, I meet thee now my form adorned with fashion's most approved requisite." Royal Worcester WCC Corsets.[415]

But the object of the joke is different in this sketch than in the Venus de Milo models. The armless models and the modern Juliet smack of tongue-in-cheek mockery of the "new woman" dress reformer and the fashionable "modern woman," respectively. This leads me to question the sincerity of the depiction of the woman at the piano, whose skirt, upon closer inspection, matches the vase in the background.

In any case, a lady who was inclined to do more than simply peruse the available corset designs wouldn't have to look very carefully to feel affronted, unless of course she, too, found *both* dress reformers and elegant ladies insufferable. Considering what we know about the foreign, custom couture purchasing practices of social elites like Palmer, I think we can understand the Worcester Company as sharing an inside joke with their lower-class consumers at the expense of the ladies that would consider themselves above Worcester Company's mass-produced, ready-to-wear corsetry. And yet, the women mocked are the very ones depicted modeling the Worcester corsets, a complex move that depended not only on lower- to middle-class women's bitterness toward their fashionable

[415] Worchester Company Pamphlet.

betters, but also on their desire to dress like them. The Worcester Company was clearly willing to risk that these conflicted feelings were common among the women visitors to the World's Fair.

For the ladies that fell for the pamphlet's marketing scheme, the Worcester Company was kind enough to throw in a complimentary copy of *The Ladies' Companion*, complete with excerpts from "every department of literature, embellished with original engravings, and music arranged for the piano forte, harp and guitar."[416] Thus the company promised not only to make their customers' silhouettes into a replica of ladies of the upper class, but also to aid in further articulating their bodies through reading, elocution, and musical performance. The women could thus emerge fully-formed models of ideal modern womanhood: the image the Woman's Building taught and the Manufactures Building sold.

To summarize this complicated web of conflicting fashion ideologies: within the world of the Fair, visitors would feel the presence and envy of the fashionable elite alongside advertisements and exhibits promising to form them into models of modern femininity. With mass production driving down the price of corsets for ladies striving to move up the social ladder, and the American belief that achieving a beautiful ideal functioned as a token of political power, it's no wonder that the strongly-worded beliefs of dress reformers, mostly fell on "stony ground."[417]

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[416] *Ladies Companion and Literary Expositor* (New York, W. W. Snowden). Originals of volumes 4-12, 14-16, and 19 (1835-1843) held at University of Michigan, digitized by HathiTrust Digital Library. http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000532210 (accessed December 20, 2015).

[417] Minna Gordon Gould, "Harmonious Adjustment through Exercise," in *The Congress of Women,* 661-662.

**Topics of Domesticity at the Woman's Congresses**

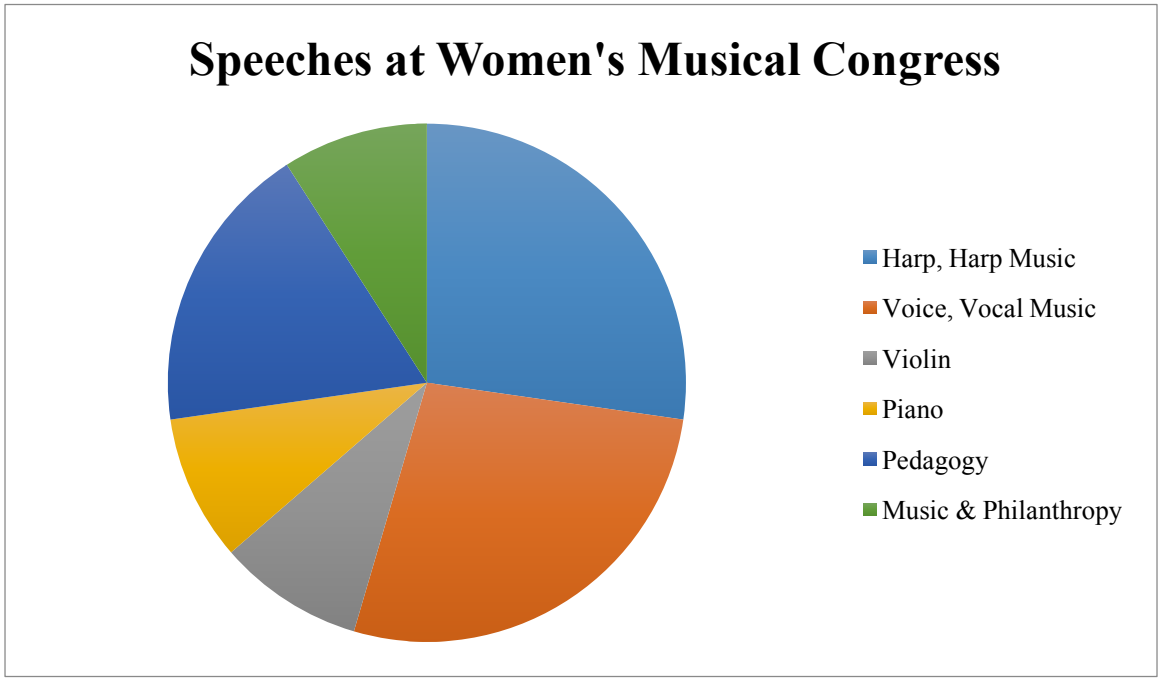
Not all of the speeches at the Congress of Representative Women were as radical as the dress reformers'; many focused on subjects like the definition of ideal womanhood, homemaking, children's education, and the arts. Six speakers addressed music, compared to thirteen talks on visual art and four on elocution and acting. Two months after the Congress of Representative Women, on July 5-7, women musicians hosted a separate "Woman's Musical Congress" which featured both performances and talks with only women participants. In addition, thirty-four musical clubs met at the National Convention of Amateur Musical Clubs from June 21 through June 24, organized by Rose Fay Thomas.[418] In her master's thesis, Ashley Geer examines Fay Thomas' efforts during the Fair as a crucial factor in the emergence of women's musical clubs in the U.S. Together, these three events in May, June, and July—the Congress of Representative Women, the National Convention of Amateur Musical Clubs, and the Woman's Musical Congress—show the centrality of music to women's lives, and to the ideal of modern womanhood.

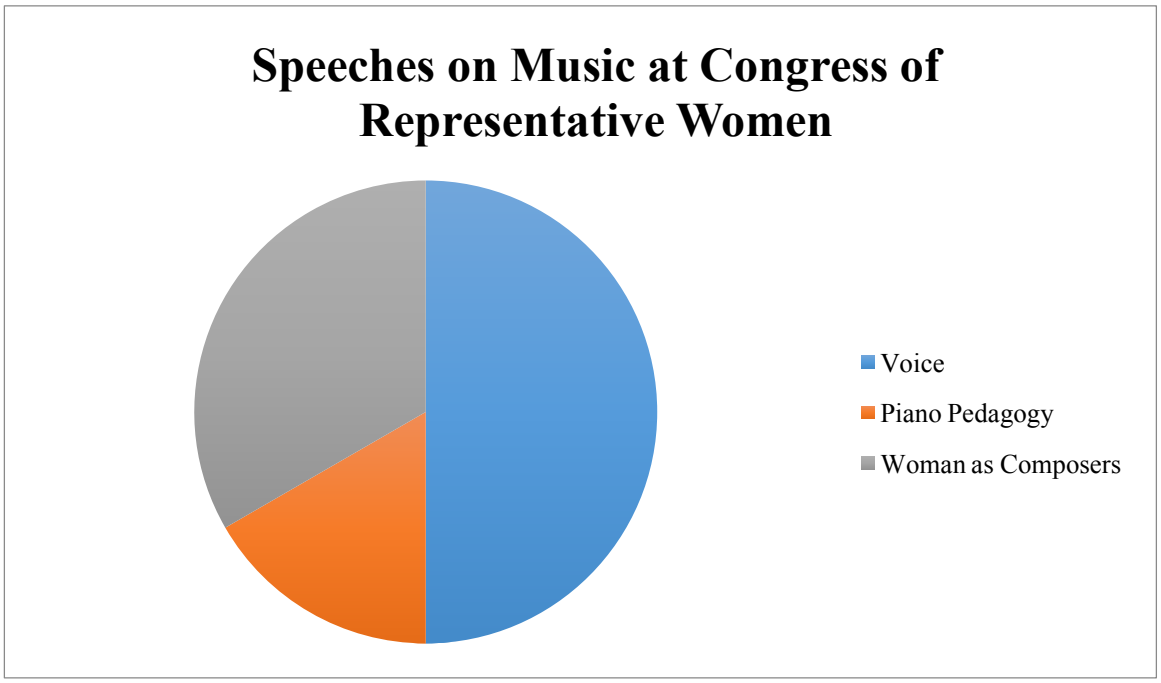
Isolating the speeches on music at both the Congress of Representative Women and the Woman's Musical Congress reveals a similar split between radical topics which advocated for women's breach of musical gender norms, and topics that fit Victorian ideals of women's musical performances. Of the six music talks at the Congress of Representative Women in May, one was on piano pedagogy for children, three discussed the "vocal art," and two advocated for women's composition capabilities. At the Women's Musical Congress, there was again a strong emphasis on womanly musical

[418] Geer, 1. Geer is further developing this work in her dissertation.

pursuits: one speech on piano, two on pedagogy, one on music and philanthropy, three on the voice and vocal music, three on the harp, and only one about women as composers (see charts for full breakdown, figures 4.16 and 4.17). Though professional women composers and performers were active in the planning of the Musical Congress, the topics of the speeches perfectly fit both Bertha Palmer's philanthropic interests and her musical abilities: remember that Palmer received high marks in finishing school in harp, piano, and vocal music.

Despite this traditionalist emphasis, at both the Congress of Women and the Musical Congress, speakers framed women's traditional roles, like domestic music-making, in a way to mark them as serious, even scientific. For instance, in their speeches on the "vocal art" at the Congress of Representative Women, all three speakers compared the voice and/or the body to an instrument, approaching vocal pedagogy from a decidedly scientific standpoint, and echoing the concerns for physical health of the speakers quoted earlier.




Figures 4.16 and 4.17. Speech topics relating to music at Women's Musical Congress and Congress of Representative Women.

General physician and surgeon Dr. M. Augusta Brown, for instance, described vocal art, "like all fine art" as having a "mechanical-practical" side.[419] The whole body, she said, "is a part of the musical instrument and must be considered. The ability and activity of the immediate vocal apparatus depends upon the general strength and condition of the body as a whole."[420] She describes the physical adjustments needed to produce proper vocal technique in great detail. For instance, she says,

> Many singers find it hard to keep the back part of the tongue in its place, but to practice properly the broad *la* on the back part of the tongue will soon subdue that unruly member, as also will the practice of the pleasing, rippling laugh of a child, *ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha.* This exercise is also a specific for indigestion. There is real healing power in a good, hearty laugh. If two or three dyspeptics should meet daily and laugh and laugh, their indigestion would soon disappear. If any of you are troubled in this way, you can experiment.[421]

Her medical approach to singing echoes other speakers' emphases on health and balance, and the importance she places on the strength of the body echoes the shifting image of ideal womanhood. There is also overlap between Brown's pedagogical approach to singing and dress reform. Later in the talk, she drew a direct correlation between restrictive fashion and singing:

> The object of my study [has been] to know the causes of voice failure, its restoration, preservation and building, it is astonishing how a small and seemingly insignificant thing may temporarily unbalance a voice. Let us look for some of the causes of impairment.
> . . .
> The slightest change… affects the quality of tone… The formation of the mouth differs in each individual, and a difference of a hair's breadth changes the quality of the tone. The slightest change in thought, feeling, change of the muscles of the head, face, throat or chest, wrinkling the brow, holding the eyes fixed, lifting the

[419] Augusta Brown, "Extracts from Vocal Art" in *The Congress of Women,* 477.
[420] Brown, 479.
[421] Brown, 482.

> arms, *tight shoes, corsets,* a corn on the toe, in fact, any change in position, feeling or condition, changes the tone.[422]

I can imagine concern for vocal tone wasn't a strong enough endorsement for amateur women musicians to give up their corsets, if decades of concern for their lives hadn't been. But Brown's connection of corsets to the voice is valuable, and reaffirms that even though the corset was no longer linked to TB, it was still considered to have a negative impact on vocal sound.

Norwegian American vocal teacher Thora Bjorn's talk took a similar scientific approach to singing. She said that the "key to the natural voice in this part of our natural organism" is the vocal glottis, and that "we can not [sic] leave the voice untrained until we understand its nature."[423] Austrian vocalist and teacher Louisa Cappiani takes this science of singing and the body to the next level, by drawing a direct connection between the well-trained body and an instrument: correct singing, she said, produces the effect of a "living Aeolian harp."[424]

Brown, Bjorn, and Cappiani's scientific approaches to vocal technique represent renderings of woman's art by women using masculinized discourses of science and medicine, adding weight and validity to their insights. While seeking to elevate women's domains to match more "serious" endeavors, they also strengthened the association of woman with modern industrial product, like the Edison Talking Doll displayed at the 1889 Paris Exposition.

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[422] Brown, 478, 480. Emphasis mine.
[423] Thora Kunigunde Bjorn, "Vocal Art," in *The Congress of Women,* 740.
[424] Louise Cappiani, "Voice Culture," in *The Congress of Women,* 500.

**Women's Music at the Fair**

While Brown, Bjorn, and Cappiani outlined women's approach to vocal music, seven orchestral pieces[425] and over fifty-five chamber pieces by women composers were performed over the course of the Fair. Most of these pieces were performed in concerts organized by women, though four of the orchestral pieces—by Helen Hood, Margaret Ruthven Lang, Russian Grand Duchess Alexandra Josiphovna, and Frenchwoman Augusta Holmes—were performed by the Exposition Orchestra under Fair Music Director Theodore Thomas.

Thomas led daily concerts beginning in May through August, when he was fired after prolonged disagreements with Fair organizers who pressed him to program more accessible music. Through his Festival Hall, Music Hall, and even his Popular Music Series, Thomas's main goal for his musical programming was one of uplift: to bring "serious" European classical music to the U.S. in order to expose American audiences to music that, as Block writes, Thomas considered "the pinnacle of the Darwinian evolutionary ladder."[426] Thus despite his inclusion of four pieces by women, the overall programming heavily favored composers like Wagner, Beethoven, Strauss, Dvorak, and Tchaikovsky. Three pieces by women appeared during Pops concerts, but that was out of 393 total pieces, 47 of which were arrangements or overtures from Wagner operas.

[425] These orchestral pieces and the impact of performance at the WCE on women composer's careers is discussed in Feldman, "Being Heard: Women Composer and Patrons at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition."
[426] Block, 78.

Further, women's compositions never appeared in the Festival Hall concerts, which admitted the largest audiences.[427]

In contrast, concerts organized by the Women's National Music Committee showcased American women as composers and amateur performers at semi-monthly concerts at the Woman's Building.[428] Programming was competitive. Music committee chairman Lena Burton Clark explained in a circular:

> Believing that the progress of American women in musical knowledge and experience can not [sic] be more simply and effectively shown… [the committee] has designed a series of musical illustrations… at which only women or girls who are amateurs, possessed of talent and a high order of musical ability, and who have been residents of America for at least ten years, will be permitted to appear… [They] must first be tested and approved by a jury selected by the Woman's National Committee on Music, and satisfactory to Theodore Thomas.[429]

In an advertisement for the audition process, which would begin February 1893, Clark added:

> The concerts are intended to provide a public appearance for those amateurs of distinction who are shut out from the concert room of the professional, and w[h]o, for various reasons, would not wish to appear therein. Quartettes, trios, either vocal or instrumental, choral and orchestral organizations of women will be eligible for examination.[430]

Advisory committees presided over auditions in every state, not in public spaces, but rather, in the homes of Lady Managers or committee members.[431]

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[427] World's Columbian Exposition, Bureau of Music, *Official programme of exposition concerts: Chicago, May-Oct, 1893* (Chicago, 1893?).
[428] Feldman, Notes for *Women at an Exposition,* CD-ROM.
[429] Lena Burton Clark, "Music In The Woman's Building," in *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,* Edited by Maud Howe Elliott (Chicago; New York: McNally & Company, 1894), 137.
[430] Clark, "Music In The Woman's Building," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated* II (March, 1892-March 1893): 235.
[431] "For Concerts by Women: Plans Promulgated by the National Committee on Music," *Chicago Tribune*, May 28, 1893.

Though the number of professional women musicians was increasing at the end of the nineteenth century, Clark limited the regular concerts at the Woman's Building to "amateur" musicians. Clark states in the circular, "all women following music as a profession and wishing to appear in the Woman's Building, will make application to Theodore Thomas."[432] But if many did, their applications met with little success. Amy Beach had submitted three orchestral works to Thomas: her *Mass in E-flat major*; *The Minstrel and the King* op. 16, a cantata for tenor and baritone soloists, male chorus, and orchestra; and an aria for contralto and orchestra, *Eilende Wolken,* based on Schiller's *Mary Stuart*.[433] But aside from conducting her *Festival Jubilate* at the opening of the Woman's Building (which was on Palmer's commission), Thomas declined to conduct any of her works.[434]

Clark's conservative approach ensured that the dominant portrayal of women in music adhered to Victorian ideals. And yet, the Woman's Building, though it may have been trussed up like a parlor, was a public space. As Mary Frances Cordato points out, the use of space in the Woman's Building served "to extend the roles and self-consciousness of [women's] sex in the public arena,"[435] paralleling the rapid formation of woman's clubs, which Karen Blair identifies as a sort of "domestic feminism."[436]

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[432] Clark, 235.
[433] Block, 78.
[434] Block believes that had Thomas not been fired in August, he may have performed another of Beach's works and more works by American composers. I think this may be too generous, especially given recent insights by Katherine Preston and Douglas Shadle into Thomas's neglect of U.S. composers in his programming.
[435] Mary Frances Cordato, "Representing the expansion of woman's sphere: Women's work and culture at the World's Fairs of 1876, 1893, and 1904" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1989), 242.
[436] Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980), 1. Quoted in Geer, 27.

Participation in clubs allowed a breach of the domestic space, but only because such participation was based on "old-fashioned goals like love of nation, family, beauty, home, and sharing…so the work was acceptable and nonthreatening to the upholders of the status quo."[437] The Woman's Building similarly provided an extension of the home, whose domestic structure—complete with a nursery, kitchen, parlor, and library[438]—allowed women to enter, participate, and even perform in a public space. I have yet to locate any record of the amateurs that were selected to perform in Clark's semi-monthly concerts, but that may be partly because programs were not printed. This absence speaks to the effort on the part of the Music Committee to keep the concerts fully enmeshed in amateurism, in order to appeal to middle- to upper-class women musicians: those musicians who had been taught that performances that added, rather than hurt, virtue were ones completed only within private spaces, as an amateur.

The Woman's Musical Congress, in contrast, included performances and lectures by women professionals, and the programming was advertised in the *Chicago Tribune*. The Congress featured twenty-two parlor songs, six art songs,[439] three vocal quartets, three sets of short piano works, and Beach's *Romance* op. 23 for violin and piano[440] (for a full list of speech and performance programming, see Appendix). Parlor song, the genre

[437] Blair, 1; quoted in Geer, 27.
[438] Cordato, 241.
[439] Classifying "art song" as opposed to "parlor song" is not an exact science, no more than defining who counts as an "amateur" or a "professional." For the purposes of this chapter, I classify as "art song," any song by a foreign composer, in a foreign language, or by Amy Beach, who by 1893 was a well-established professional composer of "art music," as her commission from the Board testifies. I use "parlor song," for all other solo song with piano accompaniment in English that conforms to the standards of nineteenth-century popular sheet music.
[440] "Songs and Lectures," *Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1893.

of composition considered most acceptable for women, dominated the Women's Musical Congress. This matches the conservative bent of both Clark's musical programming and the musical speeches at the congresses.

For example, Mary Knight Wood's *Ashes of Roses* (for score, see figure 4.18) is a perfect example of Victorian parlor song. It features rolled chords in the piano and an easy octave range in C Major. Some of the other parlor songs featured at the congress have slightly expanded vocal ranges: Eleanor Smith's *The Quest* has a range of an octave and a fourth. But the average range of the parlor songs is a tenth, compared to an average range of a twelfth for the art songs featured at the Musical Congress. Further, art songs featured, on average, a two-and-a-half-bar phrase length, while *Ashes of Roses* has a phrase length of one-and-a-half bars, which is fairly common among the parlor songs featured. Apparently, the ideal of strength and vitality had not heightened the expectations of amateur's abilities. This isn't surprising, given the link Augusta Brown drew between corseting and vocal sound. Since dress reform had not yet caught on, the parlor songs' phrase length is reflective of their target audience, who were still corseted women singers in the home.

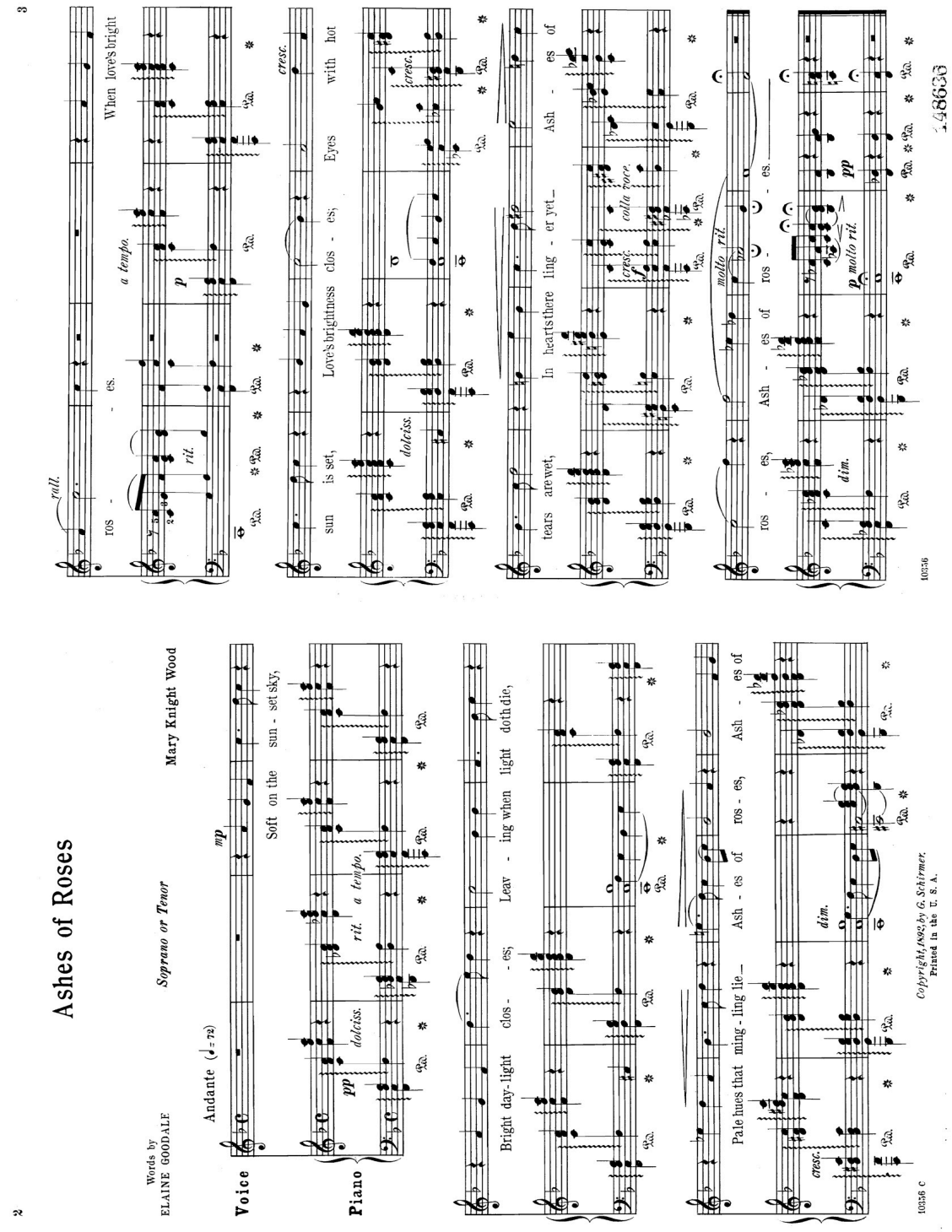


Figure 4.18. Mary Knight Wood, Elaine Goodalf, "Ashes of Roses" (G. Schirmer, 1892).

The music at the Women's Musical Congress was also conservative thematically, in adhering to traditional sentimental texts common to nineteenth-century parlor song. Ninety percent of the parlor song texts feature pastoral themes, and seventy percent are about love. Wood's *Ashes of Roses* features both themes. Other pastoral texts sometimes literally depict the actions of a shepherdess, or simply allude to nature or describe a season. For instance, Maude Valerie White's *The Throstle* rejoices at the coming of summer, and Kate Vannah's *Good Bye, Sweet Day* solemnly considers a sunset.

Sentimental and pastoral elements are also sprinkled throughout the "art" songs and even the few instrumental works that feature programmatic titles. For instance, included among Beach's pieces performed at the Fair were the piano piece *In Autumn* and the song *Sweetheart, Sigh no More,* in which a man asks a bird to sing "all summer long" the words "sweetheart, sigh no more." Chaminade's *L'Été* and Maude Valerie White's *Ici Bas* continue the trend.

**The Rural and/in the Modern**

The prevalence of pastoral themes is a common feature not only in the Fair's music, but also in the art organized by Bertha Palmer and Sarah Hallowell for the loan exhibition in the Woman's Building. So why—within a Woman's Building at the Fair, in between scientific descriptions of vocal technique and discussions of women's rights—did the Music Committee choose to emphasize women composers and performers of parlor song? And why did composers, performers, and artists choose to offer pieces on pastoral and/or sentimental themes?

Perhaps it would be better to question the seeming contradiction of rurality and traditional roles with modernity. Why draw lines to exclude aspects of the board's conception of modern woman to fit male-defined limitations on what constitutes the modern?

Regina Palm critiques the pastoral emphasis of much of the women's art at the Fair. She writes that unlike some of the murals in the Woman's Building (as we'll see), many women painters failed to "reference women's suffrage or depict any semblance of a modern woman; women are instead portrayed in romanticized roles such as the doting mother… or as young women frolicking in nature."[441] Many scholars have noted that the association of woman and nature served to exclude women from modernity. Felski notes that this association situated women outside of history and social change: the female body became a refuge of "atemporal authenticity," a haven safe from the modernizing effects of technology and mass production.[442]

But the inclusion of pastoral imagery in texts, music, and art is part of the modern imaginary. Take for instance, the long-running editorial penned by "the Country Contributor" in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Janet Casey, in her analysis of the *Journal*, writes that,

> On the surface, of course, rural culture might seem something of an embarrassment to a society, and a magazine, in the throes of a self-conscious modernity… And yet the popularity of the Country Contributor suggests the importance of keeping rurality visible, both as an ideological foil for modernity's anxieties and instabilities and as a nationalist legacy.[443]

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[441] Palm, 133.
[442] Felski, 16.
[443] Janet Galligani Casey, *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 9.

Women's inclusion of the rural and sentimental at the Fair does not simply represent a conservative clinging to Victorian sentimentality in order to present Modernism's safer Other, though that is definitely part of the equation. If it were only miniature genres that were featured by women composers, that analysis might suffice. But the concerts at the Woman's Building included a mixture of genres. This reflects the board's conflicting images of womanhood; the *Ladies' Home Journal's* setting of the "Country Contributor" alongside slick advertisements for fancy corsets;[444] and, as we'll see, Mary Cassatt's mural *Modern Woman,* which depicts women in homosocial clusters, in the newest Parisian fashions, in untainted nature.

This inflection of the rural imaginary with the industrial modern parallels the seeming paradox in contemporary conceptions of womanhood. While women were equated with the natural, they were also linked with mass production and mass culture, as established in chapter two. This is especially evident in the work of the women who organized and participated in the World's Fair, whose actions have been remembered as one monolithic movement, outside of modernism. One final example, Mary Cassatt's *Modern Woman,* perhaps most clearly demonstrates how feminine and feminist, rural and urban, and traditional and modern can and did coexist in the construction of modern womanhood.

[444] Casey, 7.

**Mary Cassatt, *Modern Woman***

Like the common recognition of the two seemingly irreconcilable sides of the Woman's Movement—the Militant Woman and the Womanly Woman—many scholars have noted a similar contradiction in *fin-de-siècle* art. Norma Broude sees this conflict within Cassatt's artistic output. Broude sets Cassatt's mother-and-child paintings alongside art she sees as challenging feminine norms, and concludes,

> What we see here, I propose, is an important and widespread pattern of resistance on the one hand and simultaneous complicity on the other, a pattern typical of many Euro-American women artists and intellectuals… Like Cassatt, these women desired autonomy, success, and fame, but they had also absorbed the patriarchal values of their bourgeois, Victorian era.[445]

In this analysis, Broude situates Victorian norms as *contradictory*, even *oppositional to* autonomy and success. Broude goes further, recognizing the contemporary affinity between Victorian femininity and nature: closely allied ideas excluded from modernism. Cassatt's uses of rural and domestic spaces, then, are principal ways in which her art lies outside the bounds of modernity. Broude argues that this is a symptom of her actual exclusion: Cassatt didn't have the same "access to the wider public sphere—the streets and cafes and music halls that were the prime subjects of modernity for their male colleagues, while their own experience limited them and their art to the domestic realm."[446] Broude's purpose is to rehabilitate Cassatt's art as modern, but only by looking for ways in which Cassatt *resists* the feminine/rural paradigm, going so far as examining mothers' faces for any glimmer of dissatisfaction.

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[445] Norma Broude, "Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman or the Cult of True Womanhood?" *Woman's Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (Autumn 2000-Winter 2001): 36.
[446] Broude, 40.

Rather than search for resistance, I argue that even when Cassatt *does not openly resist,* she still participates in the creation of modernism, just maybe not *the* Modernism that's limited to male artists and masculine spaces. Modernity and femininity are not mutually exclusive, and by assuming that they are we reproduce women's exclusion from the history of modern art and their agency in creating modernist ideals. If Cassatt recognized her art as modernist, we need to rework our definition of modernity to include it. Musical modernism, likewise, should include the music women created in the name of modernity, despite the genre, and despite its degree of reliance on rural or sentimental themes or other traditionally gendered stereotypes.

Cassatt's mural for the Woman's Building, *Modern Woman*, in contrast to her mother-and-child paintings, is now widely considered a feminist work of art. Palmer commissioned Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies, both American ex-pats living in France, to create two 14-by-58-foot allegorical murals of "Primitive Woman" and "Modern Woman" for the central court of the Woman's Building in order to demonstrate the progress of woman.

Palmer requested that MacMonnies' "Primitive Woman" mural "show woman in her primitive condition as a bearer of burdens and doing drudgery, either an Indian scene or a classic one in the manner of Puvis."[447] MacMonnies followed Palmer's instructions to the letter, though later Palmer had to add a further request that these primitive women

[447] Bertha Honoré Palmer, letter to Sarah Hallowell, Feb. 24, 1892. Bertha Honoré Palmer Correspondence Collection, Art Institute of Chicago.

be *fully clothed*.[448] Of Cassatt's "Modern Woman" Palmer wanted "as a contrast, woman in the position she occupies today."[449] Cassatt, at the height of her career at the center of the impressionist movement in France, was herself a modern woman, and still relatively unknown in the U.S. Art historian Judith Barter writes that Cassatt was "drawn to the feminist character of the entire undertaking. The prospect of contributing a major mural on the subject of women to a building designed and decorated by women and devoted to work by women at a venue sure to be seen by hundreds of thousands proved irresistible."[450] *Modern Woman* is Cassatt's only work of public art, in part because murals were considered the most masculine domain of art and most difficult for women artists to access, similar to women composers' limited access to public genres.

Cassatt was a fitting choice to represent the conflicting views of the Women's Board because of her liminal position between traditionalist and modernist agendas. Pollock writes that because she was known for her feminist stance, her affiliation with the impressionist school, and her mother-and-child paintings, by 1893, Cassatt "was being hailed as a leading modernist painter of both the New Woman and her socially varied motherly sisters."[451] The resulting mural, too, juxtaposed the ideals of Victorian womanhood and New Woman independence that reflected Palmer's and the Board's mixed images of modern womanhood while emphasizing women's health and activity.

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[448] Palmer to Mary Fairchild McMonnies, Jan. 4, 1892. Bertha Honoré Palmer Correspondence Collection, Art Institute of Chicago.
[449] Bertha Honoré Palmer, letter to Sarah Hallowell, Feb. 24, 1892. Bertha Honoré Palmer Correspondence Collection, Art Institute of Chicago.
[450] Judith A. Barter, *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 87.
[451] Pollock, 67.

The mural features a wide decorative border that divides it into three separate sections; Cassatt described the three paintings in a letter to Palmer:

> I took for the subject of the central and largest composition young women plucking the fruits of knowledge or science & —that enabled me to place my figures out of doors & allowed for brilliancy of color . . . I will still have place on the side panels for two compositions, one, which I shall begin immediately, is young girls pursuing fame. This seems to me very modern & besides will give me an opportunity for some figures in clinging draperies. The other panel will represent the Arts, Music (nothing of St. Cecelia), Dancing & all treated in the most modern way.[452]

Cassatt's choice to depict women in an idealized pastoral setting creates a sharp juxtaposition with their modern, fashionable clothing, reflecting the duality of the board and the women's concerts within the homosocial world of the Woman's Building. While she appeals to both traditional and radical views of womanhood, Cassatt's paintings exude ideal health and vitality. Pollock quotes contemporary art critic Gustave Geffroy, who wrote that the "essential character of Cassatt's art… the emanation of life, made up of summer's temperature and the scent of flesh."[453] Gone were the consumptive women with pale brows and flushed cheeks, replaced with Cassatt's women "with freckled faces, hard rural countenances, and clearcut, impassive faces."[454] Geffroy also noted that Cassatt "loves the balance of bodies, the graceful movements of arms, the complexions of faces. She seeks out these external aspects, this fine health, this psychological tranquility of human beings" rather than "quiverings and agonies of the maternal spirit."[455]

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[452] Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Oct. 11, 1892. Quoted by many, including Carolyn Kinder Carr and Sally Webster, "Mary Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies: The Search for Their 1893 Murals," *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 59; and Barter, 88.
[453] Quoted in Pollock, 67.
[454] Quoted in Pollock, 67.
[455] Quoted in Pollock, 67.

Perhaps Cassatt's depiction of strength and movement in the bodies of her women is one of the qualities that Palmer found so attractive in Cassatt's work. The health and vitality of their complexions was noted less often, however, than their high, modern fashion: their *second* skin. Indeed, Cassatt's mural parallels not only Palmer's strong modern womanhood, but also her personal fashion. Cassatt's mural was often criticized for this. Cassatt wrote,

> Mr. Avery sent me an article from one of the New York papers this summer, in which the writer, referring to the order given to me, said my subject was to be "The Modern Woman as glorified by Worth." That would hardly express my idea, of course I have tried to express the modern woman in the fashions of our day and have tried to represent those fashions as accurately as possible & in as much detail as possible…[456]

Pollock points out that Cassatt was not the first to render Worth's fashions in painting, but was following Renoir's *Madame Charpentier and her Children* (1878), Sargent's *Madame Paul Poirson* (1885), and Méry Laurent's *Autumn* (1881).[457] The fleeting nature of fashion mirrored Impressionist subjects, and this use of Worth's designs in modernist art aligned high fashion with modernity.[458] In choosing Worth to design many of her gowns, Palmer not only acted in ways to solidify her social and political power, as we've seen, but she also formed herself into the personification of the women rendered by some of her favorite modern artists. This adds another layer of meaning to Palmer's fashion choices: we can understand her dress as her own modernist expression and her way of embodying modernism.

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[456] Quoted in Pollock, 54.
[457] Pollock, 55.
[458] Pollock, 55.

**Music in the Mural**

In addition, similar to Palmer's allusion to *The Republic* through her fashion, Cassatt's depiction of music in "the most modern way"[459] reveals an allusion to feminine allegory for feminist purposes. Cassatt herself wrote, in her letter to Palmer quoted above, that her depiction of music would be "nothing of St. Cecelia."[460] Cassatt puts a banjo into the musician's lap, rather than a lute, reappropriating the allegorical female Music for modern reality.

The banjo, though originally an African-American instrument, had gained immense popularity in the 1880s-90s across class and racial lines, and was mass-produced in numbers sufficient to meet the public interest.[461] Sally Webster has argued that both the banjo player and the woman performing the popular skirt dance in the mural's right panel were symbols of the utmost modernity and reveal Cassatt's awareness of American women's contemporary tastes. Karen Linn agrees, writing, "the 1880s-90s banjo fad among young bourgeois women had been one expression of their desire for an increased informality and acceptance of new social roles and leisure values."[462]

The association of the banjo with modernity and women's increased freedoms found its way into contemporary images, though not often in paintings. Lydia Hamessley

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[459] Cassatt to Bertha Palmer, Oct. 11, 1892. Quoted by many, including Carolyn Kinder Carr and Sally Webster, "Mary Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies: The Search for Their 1893 Murals," *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994), 59; and Barter, 88.
[460] Ibid.
[461] Barter, 96.
[462] Lydia Hamessley, "Within Sight: Three-Dimensional Perspectives on Women and Banjos in the Late Nineteenth Century," *19th-Century Music* 31, no. 2 (November 2007): 149. Quoting Karen Linn, *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 98-99.

discovered an association between the banjo and the maligned New Woman in stereoview images, which served to undermine banjo manufacturers' attempts to elevate the instrument's cultural associations. In order to appeal to middle- to upper-class ladies, banjo manufacturers attempted to link the instrument with sentimentality and rurality, which, when set alongside its association with radical womanhood, caused conflicting cultural associations that Hamessley finds paradoxical. But as we've seen, this seeming paradox—between urban modernity and sentimentality/rurality—was ubiquitous in depictions by and of modern ladies. Though we can't know if Cassatt was familiar with these stereoview images,[463] Cassatt's depiction of the banjo alludes to both its mobility and its recent popularity. The banjo player, then, represents the modern woman's increased mobility, no matter how slight: out of the parlor, into the garden.

While the banjo player is an appropriation of feminine allegory for feminist purposes, it is simultaneously an overt appropriation of African-American culture. While many have discussed the appropriation of the banjo by blackface performers and later by banjo manufacturers and white middle- to upper-class consumers, this critique has not come to bear on Cassatt's mural. Her inclusion of an instrument marked as racially Other in the hands of a white musician is appropriative in the extreme, an appropriation even more troubling given the Board of Lady Managers' overt exclusion of African-American women's voices in the organization and execution of the Fair. Like the inclusion of minstrelsy in binder's volumes, the exhibits of handicrafts by racial Others in the

[463] Hamessley argues for the ubiquity of the stereoview images in the U.S. at the time, but since Cassatt lived in Paris, I'm not sure that she would have had similar access.

Woman's Building, and the speeches about exotic places and people at the Women's Congress, Cassatt's representation of the banjo player again shows how Black cultural products were integrated into middle- to upper-class white culture: only at the hands of white women.

**The Modern Eve**

Cassatt again alludes to a feminine allegory in her central painting, in the young woman passing the fruit of knowledge to a new (here, female) generation. Not only does this reflect the Women's Board's focus on educational reform, but also Cassatt's attempt to rehabilitate the figure of Eve, from a maligned temptress to a noble, active seeker of knowledge. The figure of Eve had been used repeatedly to justify women's exclusion from the public world and full rights of citizenship.[464] Cassatt's response was to frame Eve's actions in a positive light, and employ the oft-repeated female allegorical figure as a response to men's use of woman's body as allegory throughout the fairground (and throughout Western art broadly).

Cassatt wasn't the first to reappropriate Eve as a feminist icon. In fact, John Hutton traces Eve through a long line of proto-feminist and feminist literature, including works by Mary Wollstonecraft, Eliza Shelley, and Charlotte Brontë. Pollock notes the affinity of Cassatt's use of Eve to other feminist reappropriations, most notably Elizabeth Cady Stanton's essay on Eve in her 1895 *The Woman's Bible*. Stanton wrote:

[464] Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe, "Eve's Identity," in *Eve and the Identity of Women,* posted 2000. http://witcombe.sbc.edu/eve-women/3eveidentity.html (accessed December 23, 2015).

> The unprejudiced reader must be impressed with the courage, the dignity, and the lofty ambition of the woman. The tempter evidently had a profound knowledge of human nature, and saw at a glance the high character of the person he met by chance in his walks in the garden. He did not try to tempt her from the path of duty with jewels, rich dresses, worldly pleasures, but with the promise of knowledge, with the wisdom of the Gods. Like Socrates and Plato, his powers of conversation and asking puzzling questions, were no doubt marvelous, and he roused in the woman that intense thirst for knowledge, that the simple pleasures of picking flowers and talking to Adam did not satisfy. Compared with Adam she appears to great advantage through the entire drama.[465]

Hutton writes that Stanton and other collaborators on *The Woman's Bible* sought to portray Eve's story as "positive, even emancipatory… as an assertion of the propriety of women *acting* independently of man or male demands."[466]

It's perhaps not surprising, then, that the Eve figure was used to justify the work of the women at the Fair. Pollock draws attention to Maud Howe Elliott's allusion to Eve in the introduction to the handbook of the Woman's Building: "We have eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge and the Garden of Idleness is hateful to us. We claim our inheritance and are become workers not cumberers of the earth."[467] Elliot claims biblical justification for the public activities of modern women. Many speakers at the Women's Congress employed a similar tactic in order to naturalize a variety of women's pursuits, even music. Mrs. Eva Munson Smith began her talk justifying women's place in the composition of sacred song, by claiming, "Without doubt Eve sang in that garden of gardens, at first for very joy, to express her love and gratitude to the Creator for the boon of life… There is no sex in the gift of song writing."[468]

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[465] Quoted in Pollock, 42.
[466] Hutton, 323.
[467] Elliott, *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building.* Quoted in Pollock, 42-3.
[468] Eva Munson Smith, "Woman in Sacred Song," in *The Congress of Women*, *416*.

Art scholars seem to agree that the image of Eve evoked by Cassatt was a feminist act. But one of the most revealing aspects (and most relevant for my purposes) about Cassatt's and the many other appropriations of Eve for feminist purposes has been overlooked. Eve's reframing as a feminist icon represents women's claim of the ultimate symbol of nature and the symbolic moral yoke to limiting gender roles in the name of radical feminism. The reappropriation proves that these things—nature, biblically-defined gender norms, and feminism—were and are not mutually exclusive. This is one way in which the feminine can be and has been mined for feminist empowerment. The reappropriation of Eve, then, is essential to our understanding of the seeming contradiction inherent in all aspects of the Woman's Building, first-wave feminism, and *fin-de-siècle* U.S. women's modernism.

While seeing much of Cassatt's art as non-modern, and indeed, non-feminist, Broude, along with many other art historians, analyzes Cassatt's portrayal of the Eve allegory as a reappropriation of the image for feminist ends. So, I wonder: why is it possible to see a traditionalist allegory reappropriated for feminist ends, but impossible for scholars to find anything beneficial in women's adherence, even in part, to ideal womanhood? The emphasis of the Lady Managers, whatever side of the Woman Question they fell on, was to aid in the progress of womankind. Belittling or ignoring the acts of "womanly women" because they don't fit our idea of defiant feminism creates a constructed, limited narrative of feminism; and reenacts the violence and discrimination those women experienced in life. If we only consider outright resistance, we overlook ways in which women like Palmer, Mary Knight Wood, Beach, and Cassatt extended the

understanding of womanhood within their spheres, using varying degrees of compliance to gain and maintain power. Working from within, they made rigid patriarchal structures supple, eventually causing them to bend and break down in places where they could create spaces for women to be active. In a newly available space, they created feminine structures with the materials available to them. Treating historical people as ethnographic subjects involves respecting the meanings they fought to create, whether or not those meanings fit our own values and aims.

In creating a modern woman that was real, dynamic, and more than just a static object on a pedestal, the women at the Fair, through conflict and individual contributions, served to reappropriate allegorical images of the rural and traditional and set them against the industrial and radical to create their modernity. Mixture, tempering the transgressive with the conservative, is in itself a form of self-conscious modernism. It certainly reflects the experience of women in the late nineteenth century: while they were making progress toward political and cultural power, they still daily experienced the ideological weight of Victorian womanhood.[469]

Outside of musical and artistic portrayals of mixed modernity, a wider set of women's acts contributed to their construction of modern womanhood. The music, whether or not it can be considered Modernist, was composed by women, performed by women, in a public building designed by a woman, at an event programmed by a group of women. That's certainly modern—modern in women's adoption of masculine roles, a sort of reverse-dandyism.

[469] Palm, 133.

Let us learn from these women's self-conception and allow it to be true, or at least partially so, that they were strong, active, and agent, no matter where they fell on various women's rights issues or how they align with the existing historical narrative. Each woman who claims/has claimed agency for herself, or is attributed agency by me, or any historian, on her behalf, *was/is engaged in a radical act,* regardless of how her intentions or achievements compare to the feelings or aims of the historian. Giving agency to Victorian women, to their bodies, to their normative or subversive acts, is an ethical obligation. Recognizing their agency to do "bad" things is part of that.

## Conclusion: Mass Production, Consumption, and Cultural Memory

Shortly after the close of the World's Columbian Exposition, two fires ravaged the vacant buildings of the Fair along with French's *Republic*. MacMonnies and Cassatt's murals were lost; the stream of information about their whereabouts ends around 1911.[470] In 1918, French was commissioned to remake *The Republic* in Jackson Park, where it still stands.

After the Fair, newspapers now vacant of news of the Lady Manager's failures and triumphs were quickly filled by a new popular conception of feminine beauty; the Gibson Girl emerged from the ashes of the Board of Lady Managers. From 1895 to the start of the First World War, Charles Dana Gibson's drawings for *Life* magazine (see figure 5.1) set off a national craze; Gibson's now iconic sketches featuring a tall, thin, but shapely figure with a dark pompadour hairstyle, were exploited for all manner of popular and commercial purposes.[471] From its origins in the pages of *Life*, the ideal image was incorporated into novels, operettas, clothing lines, sheet music, and even wallpaper.[472]

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[470] Caroline Kinder Carr and Sally Webster's frustrating search for the murals is documented in their article "Mary Cassatt and Mary Fairchild MacMonnies: The Search for Their 1893 Murals" *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 52-69.
[471] Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983, 2005), 222.
[472] "The Gibson Girl's America: Drawings by Charles Dana Gibson," Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon, Library of Congress Online, http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gibson-girls-america/the-gibson-girl-phenomenon.html (accessed December 22, 2015).

Figure 5.1. Charles Dana Gibson, *Picturesque America: Anywhere in the Mountains*, Published in *Life*, May 24, 1900.[473]

Contemporary journalist Mark Sullivan accounted for the Gibson Girl's popularity by pointing to her ambiguity: the image could "at once please the crowd and satisfy the critical."[474] Dennis Downey attributes her "near-universal approval" to the increased interest in art and women stimulated by the Exposition.[475] The Gibson Girl was active, ready, and able to enter the workplace, but not a suffragette.

[473] Charles Dana Gibson, *Picturesque America: Anywhere in the Mountains*, pen and ink over graphite underdrawing, *Life* (May 24, 1900), Gift of the artist (1935), Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (005.00.00) [LC-DIG-cai-2a12817].
[474] Quoted in Dennis B. Downey, *A Season of Renewal: The Columbian Exposition and Victorian America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 125.
[475] Downey, 125.

The image's success shows women's alignment with and embodiment of mass culture in a new variation, especially as they bought and performed songs like Alfred Solman's 1908 trio of songs from his *Gibson Girl Review* (see cover page, figure 5.2).

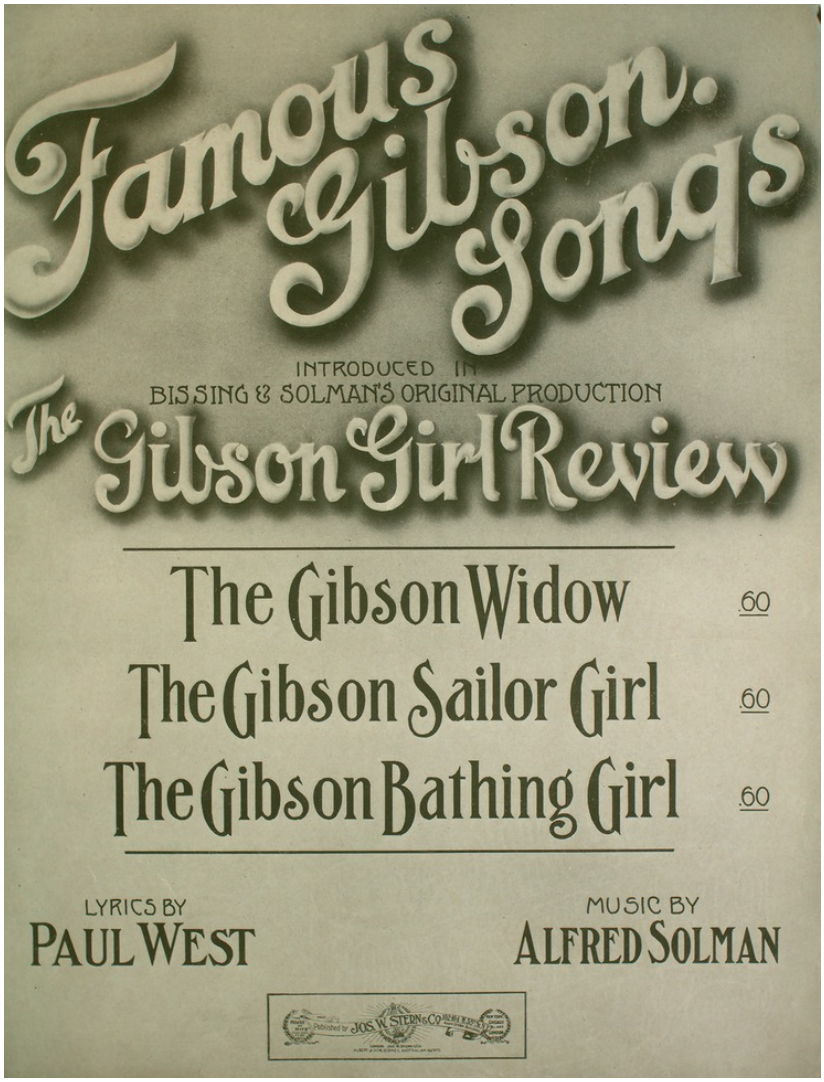


Figure 5.2. Alfred Solman, Paul West "Famous Gibson Songs," from *The Gibson Girl Review* (New York: Jos. W. Stern & Co., 1908). Box 146, Item 89, Lester Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

One hundred and seventeen women, three years of planning, and six months of exhibits in the service of a new ideal of white middle-class modern womanhood coalesced into one man's ambivalent and nameless sketch. Bertha Palmer and the Lady Manager's mixture infused this image, now fully commodified, packaged, and consumed by the entire country. And while Palmer was sure the legacy of the Board of Lady Managers would be fondly remembered as a watershed in women's rights, the Gibson Girl is the turn-of-the-century image that endured. And our shared imaginings of the events of the World's Columbian Exposition are even more telling.

While Gibson was making his first sketches of his Girl, in November 1894, news broke that many of the unexplained disappearances at the Chicago Exposition were due to the unthinkable acts of "America's First Serial Killer," H.H. Holmes. A thrilling story at the time, it has recently regained widespread currency through Erik Larson's 2004 book *Devil in the White City.* Larson notes that Holmes appreciated women's newfound freedoms and mobility, preying on women (mostly white, blonde women) who moved to Chicago for the Fair, and/or career opportunities away from their families and friends.

Larson's book, and the upcoming filmic adaptation,[476] is part of the continued popular interest in Victorian culture. The production and consumption of the nineteenth-century ideal woman has continued unaltered and unbroken from her conception to today. Among an abundance of filmic and literary depictions of Regency, Victorian, and

[476] Film is directed by Martin Scorsese with script by Billy Ray; H.H. Holmes is played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Still in development with no release date. Dave McNary, "Leonardo DiCaprio, Martin Scorsese Reunite for 'Devil in the White City,'" *Variety* (August 10, 2015). http://variety.com/2015/film/news/leonardo-dicaprio-martin-scorsese-reunite-for-devil-in-the-white-city-1201567113/ (accessed December 23, 2015).

Edwardian ladies, which most often represent a simplified ideal woman within her social sphere, nineteenth-century ideals are unfamiliar to few. As a result, the Victorians have continuously suffered what E.P. Thompson termed "the enormous condescension of posterity,"[477] from Lytton Strachey's satirical *Eminent Victorians* on.

Because of the continued depictions of Victorian women in popular culture, a better understanding of how, why, and by whom ideals and narratives about women are produced, edited, and reproduced is essential. While scholars have valorized the revolutionary minority, and movies create love interests out of the Victorian stereotype, we lose the agency and diversity of the era. Several scholars and popular historians have taken on the task of deconstructing the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries' Victorian myths, including Matthew Sweet, who writes that "it is time to…test our beliefs about that era against comparable phenomena in our own times. A whole canon of morally prescriptive writing, for instance, has been assumed to be reflective of the real lives and attitudes of Victorian people….Above all, perhaps, we should acknowledge the hypocrisies and inconsistencies present in our relationship with the Victorians."[478]

But not much as much work has been done to expose the Victorian myths in academia. One goal of this dissertation was to show various ways in which musicology has been guilty of mythologizing Victorian women. I hope it will contribute to correcting our understanding of parlor song, particularly, of the lives and experiences of the women

[477] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 12. Quoted in Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians: What We Think We Know About Them and Why We're Wrong*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), 16.
[478] Sweet, 16-17.

who performed it. In chapter one, I centered the discussion on women's bodily experience, arguing that to understand Victorian women's experience and performance, we must understand the materiality of their bodies and the role women played in conforming to, constructing, and reconstructing social mores. Chapter two shed light on ways in which women have been left out of discussions of the historical construction of whiteness. Women's participation in minstrelsy has been completely overlooked, showing a tendency to side with the myth of an all-encompassing Victorian etiquette rather than recognizing the diversity of actual practices. In chapter three, I delved deeper into claims that attribute the high amount of death themes in parlor song to familiarity, by highlighting the supposed innate link between womanhood and frailty in contemporary thought. And finally, in chapter four, the discussion moved into the Gilded Age, investigating how Victorian ideals contributed to and collided with modernity within an emerging women's public sphere.

While this dissertation has served to grant agency to the women it showcased, it also added diversity that counters the monolithic picture of Victorian women in music history: women who are often said to have performed parlor music solely as a duty, as one of the central aspects of their domestic roles. Indeed, Scholars from Tawa to Richard Leppert and Bailey take as a given that music was a "duty" for Victorian women, often speaking of the impetus to perform as equivalent to the ideally feminine desire to please

others. Candace Bailey writes that Southern women's primary purpose in music making was to please others, filling their duty with a "culture of resignation."[479]

And in some ways, for some families, this was undoubtedly the case. As pointed out by Bailey and Richard Leppert, the piano, sitting in the parlor, waited to be "called forth by the magic of touch."[480] Indeed, many families undoubtedly thought of women in this way, waiting and willing to be called to their purpose when needed. But, following Suzanne Cusick's work on Francesca Caccini,[481] I question any narrative (of which there is a surprising number) that assumes that a woman musician or worse, a whole group of women musicians, dislikes or is ambivalent about making music. It is the all-encompassing Victorian myth of music-as-womanly-duty I find most pernicious, and of all Victorian myths, it is perhaps the easiest to debunk.

There is a wealth of archival evidence showing that women enjoyed music-making. In my research, I've searched for traces of women's embodied performances through markings in binder's volumes. I've found breath marks in songs that aid my understanding of the impact of corseting. Fingerings, elaborations, and completely alternate phrases written in to the sheet music further clarify the embodied experience of these women performers. There is also evidence of enjoyment. We've seen this in the lifelong music-making of women examined in chapter two, like Edith Forbes Perkins. But most obviously, the process of collecting music and the effort and funds spent to

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[479] Joan Cashin's term. Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 2. Referenced in Bailey, 107.
[480] Bailey, 15. Quoting Mrs. Mary Scrimzeour Whitaker, "Conrad Clifford; or, the Treacherous Guest. A Southern Tale, Chapters VII-XVI," *Southern Literary Messenger* 33, no. 2 (August 1861): 86.
[481] Suzanne Cusick, "'Thinking from Women's Lives': Francesca Caccini after 1627," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 484-507.

have it bound speaks to a certain level of value placed in musical artifacts and practices. Many women note at the top of their sheet music if a member of their family particularly enjoyed a certain piece so they could be sure to play it for them, speaking to the dutiful analysis of women's performance. But in the binder's volume owned by Emma Aldridge, she carefully wrote at the top of her copy of "Annie Lisle"[482]: "My Favorite" (see figure 5.3)[483] This is surely not meant as a reminder, but as a loving mark left on a familiar tune.

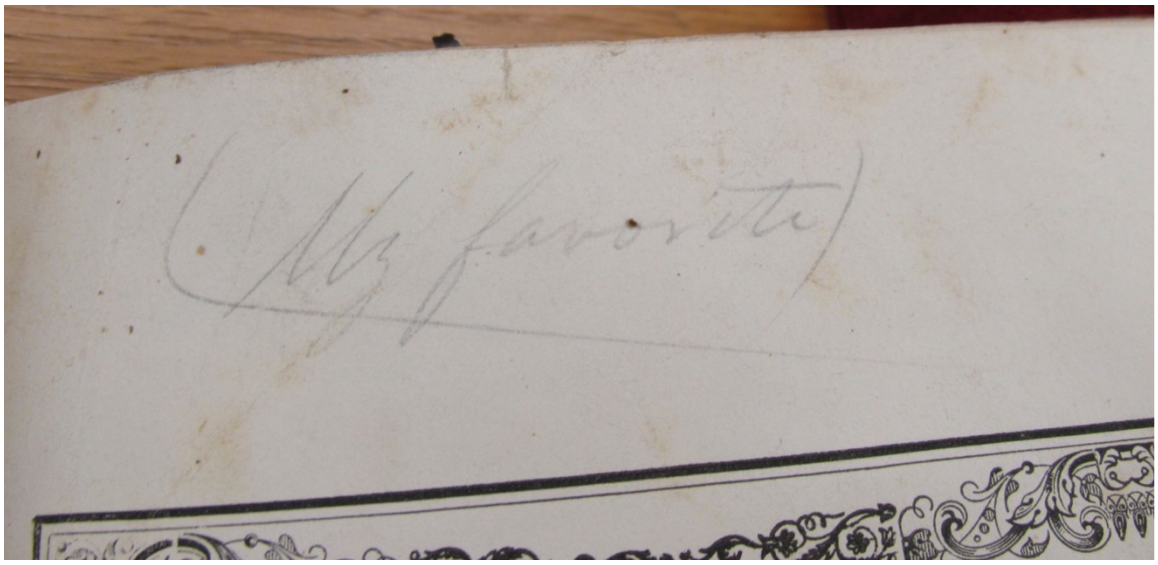


Figure 5.3. Emma's note, "My favorite" written at the top of H.S. Thompson's "Annie Lisle." Emma J. Aldridge Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 88, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Women's interactions with parlor song were certainly complicated–embroiled in power relations at the nexus of Victorian ideals, the sheet music industry, family

[482] H.S. Thompson, "Annie Lisle" (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1860).
[483] Emma J. Aldridge Bound Collection, Call no. M1.A15 vol. 88, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

expectations, and their own personal desires and tastes. And as I've shown, the intra-actions between these power relations and the other objects women created and interacted with enabled a variety of meanings for women. But one thing is common: music was not something that women practiced or performed solely out of duty. Women's agency in collection and performance had profound material and cultural repercussions.

# *Appendix*
## Schedule of Events, Woman's Musical Congress, as printed in the *Chicago Tribune,* July 2, 1893

Woman's Musical Congress
Mrs. Geo. B. Carpenter, Chairman, Mrs. Clarence Eddy, Vice Chairman

I. Wednesday, July 5, 9am, Hall 3
    1. Paper: "The Piano," Miss Amy Fay, New York
    2. Paper: "An Outline of the History of the Harp," with illustrations, Miss Maud Morgan, New York
    3. Songs:
        a. "What the Chimney Sang," Gertrude Griswald
        b. "The Throstle," Maud Valarie White
        c. "The Quest," Eleanor Smith, sung by Mrs. Katherine Fisk, Chicago
    4. Paper: "Phonation…Guidance of the Voice (When should children begin to sing)," Madame Louisa Cappiani, New York
    5. Paper: "Music as a Factor in Philanthropic Work," Miss Charlotte Mulligan, Buffalo, NY
    6. Paper: "Temperament as Governing Effect [in] Vocal Music," Miss Clara Munger, Boston
    7. Songs, sung by Mrs. Priscilla White, Boston:
        a. "Solveg's Song," Grieg
        b. Recitative and Air from "Alissandro," Handel,
    8. Compositions by Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, Boston, played by the composer
    9. Songs by Mlle. Chaminade, sung by Mrs. Corinne Moore Lawson:
        a. "Rosemonde"
        b. "Summer Song"
    10. Quartet, "The Ring and the Rose" (folksong)
    11. "Good Night," Goldmark, sung by: Mrs. Wallace Davis, first soprano; Mrs. Anne Rommeiss Thacker, second soprano; Mrs. Mina Rommeiss Summy, first alto; Mrs. Rommeiss Bremner, second alto

II. Thursday, July 6, 9am, Hall 3
    1. Paper: "Teaching as an Art," Miss Nellie Strong, St. Louis
    2. *Romance* for violin and piano, composed by Mrs. H.H.A Beach, performed by Miss Maud Powell and Mrs. A.H. Burr
    3. Paper: "Women on the Lyric Stage," Mme. Lillian Nordica
    4. Songs composed by Mrs. Clara Kathleen Rogers of Boston and sung by Miss Caroline G. Clark of Boston:
        a. "Ah, Love but a Day,"
        b. "Semum Bonum"
        c. "Out of My Own Great Woe"
        d. "Apparitions"

5. Paper: “The English Language in Song,” Octavia Hensel, Louisville, KY
6. Songs, sung by Christine Nilssen Dreier:
    a. “Good-by, Sweet Day,” Kate Vannah, Bangor
    b. “Chinese Song,” Margaret Ruthven Lang, Boston
    c. “You Called to Me” Hope Temple, London
7. Paper, “Modern Harp Music,” Miss Harriet A. Shew, Boston
8. Songs by Helen Hood, Boston; sung by Miss St. John, Rockford:
    a. “Shepherdess”
    b. “The Violet”
    c. “Expectation”
9. Paper, “Children in Music” Miss Julia L. Caruthers, Chicago, with illustrations, children songs composed by Miss Caruthers and sung by Nannie Ostergren:
    a. “Rock-a-By Baby”
    b. “Whenever a Little Child Is Born”
    c. “Robin Red Breast”
    d. “The Brook”
10. Composition, by Miss Adele Lewing of Boston. Played by the composer.

III. Friday, July 7, 9am, Hall 3

1. “The Work of Woman’s Amateur Musical Clubs in America,” Mrs. Theodore Thomas
2. Songs:
    a. “Ici Bas,” Maude Valerie White, London, Eng.
    b. “Auf Weidersehn,” Hope Temple, London, Eng.
    c. “Entreaty,” Genevra Johnston Bishop, Chicago
3. Paper: “On Method, Position and Tone Reproduction on the Harp as an Instrument of Musical Art,” Madame Josephine Chatterton, Chicago
4. Paper: “Vocal Science,” Mrs. Agnes Goodrich Vaille, Philadelphia, Pa.
5. Songs, sung by Miss Jeannette Dutton, New York:
    a. “Sweet Heart, Sigh No More,” Mrs. H.H.A. Beach
    b. “Ashes of Roses,” Mary Knight Wood
    c. “Thou,” Mary Knight Wood
    d. “Armour d’Automne,” Mlle. Chaminade, Paris
6. Piano compositions played by the composer, Mrs. Nellie Bangs Skelton, Chicago
7. Paper: “Woman Violinists as Performers in the Orchestra,” Mme. Camilla Urso
8. Selected Quartet, Mme. Wallace Davis and the Rommeiss Sisters

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